The Simplest Path to Personal and Planetary Awakening

FREE YOUR MIND

10 Keys for Unlocking Your Personal Potential, Achieving Spiritual Awakening, Transforming Global Culture, and Reclaiming the Promise of Humanity's Ultimate Cosmic Destiny

Jack Preston King

The Simplest Path to Personal and Planetary Awakening: FREE YOUR MIND

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Author's Note: *The Simplest Path to Personal and Planetary Awakening: FREE YOUR MIND* was originally published in 2006 under the pseudonym Vincent Casspriano, Jr. A 10th Anniversary Special Edition was released in 2016 using that same pseudonym. I am publishing this 2019 edition as Jack Preston King as part of an effort to bring my pseudonymous writings together under a single author name.

I added APPENDIX: MY COSMIC DOWNLOAD in February 2023 toward the end of making this spiritual system complete in one volume.

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The Simplest Path to Personal
and Planetary Awakening:

FREE YOUR MIND

By Jack Preston King

Preface to the 2019 Edition

The Simplest Path to Personal and Planetary Awakening: FREE YOUR MIND is the first book I ever wrote. The "writer's voice" here is considerably more didactic and impersonal than in my work of recent years, but I still love this book for what it is. I've written close to two dozen books since its release in 2006, some published as Jack Preston King, some using other pseudonyms, but none have been quite like this one.

The Simplest Path is a book written to accomplish a specific spiritual task, that of *recapitulating the system*.

When I began composing this book I was forty years old, which seemed quite the milestone in my life at the time. I'd been a spiritual seeker since childhood, and had decades of study and practice under my belt. The two spiritual traditions I'd been immersed in the longest were the Toltec sorcery of Carlos Castaneda, and the Fourth Way "Work" of Russian mystic George Ivanovich Gurdjieff. In both of those systems, one eventually reaches a point at which, to move forward and continue developing, the student must become the teacher. Not forever, not as a lifestyle, but simply to demonstrate that you have internalized the system, and that you are no longer dependent on your own teacher, or even the path.

To *recapitulate the system* means to create a new spiritual system that translates what you've learned to date into a language accessible to the people of your time and place. Before you can leave the path and set off alone into the limitless spiritual frontier ahead, you have to draw a map for the folks coming up the path behind you. Gurdjieff did this when he consolidated his studies across Asia and the Middle East, and brought "The Work" to Russia, then Europe, then America. Gurdjieff's chief pupil P. D. Ouspenski accomplished the same feat with his book *In Search of the Miraculous*. Castaneda's entire

oeuvre is a recapitulation of the system he learned from don Juan Matus. The Taoist sage Lao-Tzu was famously on his way to voluntary exile when the guardian of the pass begged him to leave a record of his knowledge, resulting in the Tao Te Ching.

The Simplest Path was my best shot at creating a teachable spiritual system, so I could leave it behind and move beyond such systems. In Castaneda-speak, it was written at a peak moment of *Clarity* in my life. Here's what don Juan had to say about *Clarity* in *The Teachings of Don Juan: A Yaqui Way of Knowledge:*

Once a man has vanquished fear, he is free from it for the rest of his life because, instead of fear, he has acquired clarity – a clarity of mind which erases fear. By then a man knows his desires; he knows how to satisfy those desires. He can anticipate the new steps of learning and a sharp clarity surrounds everything. The man feels that nothing is concealed.

That was my mindset when I wrote this book. I could see the net of illusion ensnaring Humanity with incredible… well, *Clarity*. I could see how it worked, and how to overcome it. Nothing was concealed.

Right about that time, by chance or synchronicity, I discovered the science of *memetics*, which studies the way ideas are transferred from mind to mind by way of imitation. The word *meme* has become associated with silly pictures on the internet, but it was originally a serious scientific term coined in 1976 by evolutionary biologist Richard Dawkins.

According to Wikipedia:

Analogous to a gene, the meme was conceived as a "unit of culture" (an idea, belief, pattern of behaviour, etc.) which is "hosted" in the minds of one or more individuals, and which can reproduce itself in the sense of jumping from the mind of one person to the mind of another. Thus what would otherwise be regarded as one individual influencing

another to adopt a belief is seen as an idea-replicator reproducing itself in a new host.

In Toltec sorcery, babies are seen to enter the world as untamed bundles of energy. Their perception roams freely, without context, accounting for the magical nature of early childhood. But within the first few years of life, parents, teachers, older children, even things like books and TV gradually teach the growing child to fix its attention on only a narrow set of "acceptable perceptions" that describe the world adults agree is real.

Here's how I explained the process in my book *Could All Religions Be True? The Short Answer is YES:*

From the moment we're born, first our parents, then eventually everyone around us, education, culture, religion, tradition, etc., train our attention away from the random magical drifting of newborn consciousness toward fixation on a particular spot within the general human band of awareness that people in our time and place define as "the real world." We are taught to "assemble the world" the people around us already live in by having our attention directed to it.

"This is real. That is not. This is important. Disregard that. This is who we are. We're not like that. We always do this. We never do that…"

We're taught the names and uses of objects. We're taught our roles within the family, society, and larger "human reality" as very narrowly defined.

Sometime in the first few years of life, we master our initial lessons, and our attention snaps into place, forming what Castaneda calls "the assemblage point." By narrowing the focus of our attention to take in only a minute slice of the reality that actually exists around (and within) us, we assemble the world that the people of our time and place

agree is real. Most of us will never experience any other reality for the rest of our lives.

The science of memetics gave me a brand new way to talk about that "reality fixation" process – one people might take seriously, I reasoned, because in the 21st Century *the world that the people of our time and place agree is real* is primarily the world as described by science.

The Simplest Path to Personal and Planetary Awakening: FREE YOUR MIND is a spiritual application of the science of memetics. It reveals the net of illusion we all get trapped in by early childhood. It shows you how that net operates and how to escape it. And it lays out a simple plan for releasing all Humanity from the net of illusion, hopefully in time to stave off major global crises like climate change or World War III.

I edited a bit here and there in the preparation of this 2019 edition, but I have not significantly rewritten any part of the book. Here it is, my first and best shot at *creating a teachable spiritual system, so I could leave it behind and move beyond such systems.*

Enjoy the map. I'll see you in the *Limitless Frontier!*

Jack Preston King
September 10, 2019

Introduction:
ARE YOU READY TO WALK THE SIMPLEST PATH?

The Simplest Path to Personal and Planetary Awakening: FREE YOUR MIND delineates in one slim volume a complete system for achieving personal spiritual awakening, along with a straightforward, no-nonsense plan individuals and groups can follow to awaken Humanity *en masse* and positively transform the world. Spiritual truth being spiritual truth, and our human condition being what it is and has been, without significant change, for millennia, nothing in the pages that follow is likely to be wholly original to me, though much of what is discussed here may come as new information to you. I am quite confident, however, that the directness and brevity with which these truths are communicated in this volume is unique. You hold in your hands a practical, bare-bones toolkit designed to empower anyone willing to sufficiently apply themselves to the task to quickly recognize the true human situation, to achieve individual psychic/spiritual liberation from it, and to take on an enlightened leadership role in the much-needed near future awakening of the greater human species.

Though this toolkit is designed so that anyone can benefit from its use, it seems only fair to point out, right here on page one, that this book is not necessarily written for a general audience. There's nothing particularly complicated ahead. It's just that what I have outlined so succinctly in the pages that follow is the unadorned truth. A great many people who claim to be "spiritual seekers," especially in wealthy, comfort-driven

cultures like the United States and Europe, are not really seeking to encounter anything so unpleasant as naked reality. Simple truth, denuded of its colorful cultural trappings and stripped of traditional pomp and circumstance can be very unappealing to "seekers" hoping to trade the dull fantasies of ordinary life for more exciting "spiritualized" feel-good daydreams. While all can profit from the truths contained in this book, the tools ahead will prove most useful to those already mentally and emotionally prepared to take them seriously and put them to work. If you are unsure which category you fall into, spiritual fantasy-chaser or serious student of awakening, before spending your hard-earned money on the purchase of this book, please consider the following:

5 GOOD REASONS NOT TO BUY THIS BOOK

- If what you want most from religion/spirituality is to be comforted in your sorrows and confusion, *don't buy this book!*

- If what you want most from religion/spirituality is reassurance that you are perfect just the way you are, or confirmation that what you already believe about yourself, God and reality is true, *don't buy this book!*

- If you believe religion/spirituality is and should ever remain "higher," "beyond," or otherwise separate from the "tainted" real world of earthly human events and issues, and you're not willing to relinquish that belief, *don't buy this book!*

- If you believe that pursuing spiritual solutions to real world problems is hopelessly naïve, and you're not willing to relinquish that belief, *don't buy this book!*

- If you are content to await rescue from the complications of human reality by traditional religious, New Age, extraterrestrial, or extraordinary human saviors, and you are not willing to take

an active role in your own or Humanity's spiritual evolution, *don't buy this book!*

If, on the other hand, you crave spiritual understanding that is transformative rather than comforting, that seeks truth beyond the limitations imposed by mere belief, that applies spiritual solutions to real world human issues, and that puts the power and responsibility to succeed or fail in your quest right where it belongs – in your own capable hands – then you are ready to walk The Simplest path.

Buy this book now!

SIMPLE BEGINNINGS

This book was conceived at the crossroads of two apparently disconnected events.

The first was my personal spiritual quest and practice, now in its fourth decade, through which I have become familiar with the many religious, spiritual and scientific concepts that form the nucleus of The Simplest Path, and which has allowed me to verify through first-hand experience which avenues of spiritual exploration produce practical results, and which do not, which work to unveil reality as it truly is, and which lead to dead ends of ego-flattering illusion.

The second event was encountering the remarkable modern science of memetics, which is an evolutionary approach to understanding human thought and behavior in terms of mind-to-mind transfer of information by way of imitation, accomplished through the auspices of physically real, and mentally viral, entities called *memes*. I won't go into detail here about what memes are, how they work, or the psychic and spiritual implications of their existence, as the first six chapters of this book are already ably dedicated to that task. What matters for this introduction is that the science of memes supplied me

with a new scientific and metaphorical language in which to express spiritual concepts that had been brewing in my mind for decades. Memes provided me with a fresh and vastly expanded context in which to understand the human mind and spirit, and to "connect-the-dots" between many apparently unrelated spiritual ideas, to reveal a cohesive picture of our earthly human condition, as well as our latent human potential, that is in equal measure frightening and inspiring.

THE IMMERSION METHOD: READING, PRACTICE, TEACHING

When I first encountered Carlos Castaneda's many works relating his apprenticeship to Toltec sorcerer don Juan Matus, I was in my late teens. There were seven books in the series at the time (*The Fire from Within* had just been published, if I recall correctly). I read them all, and recognized in them something very different from any mystical writings I had encountered to that date – and having begun my spiritual quest in earnest at the tender age of eleven, by the time I discovered Castaneda, I was already considerably better read and more experienced in metaphysical thought than were the vast majority of kids my age. Something about those books was different, alright, something I sensed deep down inside would make all the difference regarding my spiritual journey, transforming it from the colorful escapist dream I secretly knew my quest at the time to be into a real, hands-on experience of a larger reality beyond the illusion of ordinary life, if only I could grasp its hidden truth.

But, by ordinary means, I just couldn't do it. I was a skilled and avid reader, capable of easily devouring a book a day. But the standard method by which I had learned to read, alternately losing myself in the story, then periodically pulling back to analyze specific passages or unfamiliar words, to take notes, etc., as we all learned in school is the rational "approved method" for studying any text, was simply not squeezing from Castaneda's

writings the prize my intuition continued to assure me was secreted therein. So, I decided to pursue a more intuitive learning method – *total immersion.*

Over the course of the next several months, I read each of Castaneda's seven books seven times, starting with *The Teachings of Don Juan: A Yaqui Way of Knowledge*, the first book in the series, then reading the subsequent volumes in sequence all the way to the final page of *Fire From Within*, then returning without a break to the beginning and working my way, once again, through the entire series. I didn't take notes, or look up words, or analyze text, or even insist that the endless stream of words flowing into my eyes and swirling through my brain particularly make sense. I continued to live my normal life, going to work, socializing with friends, etc. But in the time allotted each day to reading, I read nothing but Castaneda's books, not even a newspaper or magazine. I took his writings into my mind as an undisturbed whole, and let them sink, as one, to a deep and silent place within my mind, where, without really "thinking" about them at all in the usual way I defined "thinking" at the time, I finally broke through and "got it."

Exactly what I "got" is part and parcel of The Simplest Path, and you'll have to read the rest of this book in order to "get it" for yourself. My reason for relating this story here in the introduction is not so much to endorse Castaneda or Toltec shamanism *per se*, but rather to illustrate the point that the "approved methods" by which we do most things in life more often act as obstructions to understanding than they do as bridges connecting us to genuine knowledge.

The entire universe, the earth, our own bodies are constructed of nothing but reality, and so, by rights, we ought to experience truth directly and be in touch with reality as it is at all times, as a simple consequence of being real creatures embedded in an objectively real world. But it doesn't work that way. Instead, if we bother to concern ourselves with such things at all, we must sweat and work and struggle to catch the tiniest

glimpse of anything real beyond the self-centered maelstrom of illusion that defines and engulfs our ordinary, daily lives. One big reason this is so is that the vast majority of methods by which we have been taught by society, education, religion, etc. to look at the reality around and within ourselves are surreptitiously designed to obscure truth, rather than to reveal it. We don't like to think that's what's happening, that we've been bamboozled, but that's the truth of it. As I will demonstrate in the chapters ahead, this fundamental perceptual problem is no accident. The chief goal of The Simplest Path is to clarify the mechanism allowing this core psychic deception to operate with impunity in our lives, and to provide practical tools for breaking its power to control our minds.

What this means, in the context of introducing this book, is that if you plan to just read *The Simplest Path to Personal and Planetary Awakening: FREE YOUR MIND* once and stop there, treating it like any other book, even one you're reasonably interested in and planning to read closely, don't expect your life to change much. Chances are that you'll benefit, and many elements of your illusory life will, perhaps even dramatically, improve. But you probably won't awaken spiritually in any measureable way, and the positive changes in your life will be short-lived. It won't be the book's fault, my defect as an author, or even your blunder, in the end, as a too-casual reader. The blame will lie, most directly, with the faulty method by which you attempted to absorb this information in the first place. Just as eating uncooked rice will make you sick, while drawing water, lighting the stove, and taking time to prepare the very same rice will fill and nourish you, so the process of immersing yourself in The Simplest Path that brings the greatest benefit is very different from the method you might apply to reading a popular novel, or even the many spiritual tomes you have likely already consumed in your lifetime that promised much but, in the end, delivered little. Reading this book seven times front to back, as I did with Castaneda's early work is, admittedly, a tad

extreme. But I do recommend working your way through this text at least three times, with each pass absorbing and processing the same information in very different ways:

First, do, in fact, read this book cover to cover to familiarize yourself in a general way with the main concepts involved. Don't take notes or highlight text. Don't perform any of the spiritual exercises in Part II. Read each exercise over, but don't spend a lot of time speculating about the effects carrying them out might produce in advance of actually doing so (which comes next). ***Warning:*** The exercise connected to *Key Question #4, What is the Value of Human Life?* has two parts, the second of which should not be read until part one has actually been completed. The text has been laid out in such a way that you can easily bundle the pages containing part two of the exercise together with a paperclip, keeping them hidden until you are ready for the unveiling. It's a good idea to pause right now and clip the pages together. Don't cheat yourself out of the full benefit of the exercise by sneaking a peek!

As soon as you have completed your first read-through, return to Chapter One and start the book over. This time read one chapter a day. As you work through the six chapters that make up Part I, spend the rest of that day contemplating and journaling about the ideas discussed. That will take six days. Follow the same pattern with Part II, but this time invest the time and energy required to perform each of the spiritual exercises in turn. Some of the exercises take hours, some days, some weeks, and some require ongoing lifestyle changes. Meet the exercises head-on, on their own terms. Let them individually and collectively impact and transform you, however long it takes to complete the process. For now, skip the Key Question Community group exercises that end each chapter in Part II. Focus only on the individual exercises.

When you have worked your way through all of the exercises, and experienced at least the initial stirrings of awakened consciousness through them, it is time to teach The

Simplest Path to others. Often times, we don't realize how well or deeply we have taken something into ourselves until we try to share it with someone else. Then, in successfully teaching what we know, we are gifted to learn everything anew, from a fresh and significantly more profound perspective. Whereas, in the first two read-throughs, we sought to absorb information, when teaching what we have learned, we are called to reach within ourselves and find the flat concepts we previously ingested transformed by our personal experience into living knowledge, worthy of transmission to another human being. By teaching what we have learned, we simultaneously expand our own understanding of the material in question, and establish authority within ourselves to take our newfound knowledge seriously, and become living examples of the truths we seek to share with the world. As you read each chapter for the third time, one each day as before, don't let the day end without teaching that chapter to at least one other person. You can describe the individual spiritual exercises in Part II to your students, but don't push them to try any without first having made their own complete initial read-through of this book. During this phase, in the course of your third read-through, as you are sharing The Simplest Path with a growing circle of friends, who are themselves acquiring direct experience of the system and beginning to teach it to others, is a good time to form your Key Question Community group and begin working through the group exercises that end each chapter in Part II.

ENTERING THE PATH

Before beginning your journey along The Simplest Path, you need gather only four items – a large notebook or journal for recording your observations and for working through written portions of the spiritual exercises in Part II; a small pocket notepad for recording observations during times when your larger journal is unavailable; a mind sufficiently open to be

willing to challenge even your most beloved and comforting beliefs; and, finally, the strength of will to take these tools into your own capable hands, and to craft with them an enlightened individual mind and life, and a bright, awakened future for all Humanity.

Part I: Uncovering the Locks

We cannot solve our problems with the same thinking we used when we created them.

– Albert Einstein

Chapter 1

THE BOXES WE DREAM IN

We are all aware of the challenges facing humanity as we navigate these first decades of the 21st Century:

- **World oil supplies are running out.**

- **Global warming is transforming the earth into a steamy greenhouse.**

- **As our technology connects the world, ideological extremism, terrorism and militarism divide us as never before.**

- **Headlines bombard us with news of war, famine, pestilence and death until we feel overwhelmed and unable to respond.**

- **Time is running out...**

This is not a book about the world's problems. This is a book about the thinking we used when creating the problems we face. It offers powerful keys for unlocking some of the major "boxes" our thinking, as a species, has been trapped within for millennia. Unlocking those boxes and breaking free of the concepts around which we have organized the present state of our world will allow us to return to the consideration of global events with a new mind. From that new perspective, our difficulties will be, if

not always less serious, at least consistently *different* from our current understanding. They won't be the same problems, because we will have changed. Our reality must follow. Because of the transformation of our thinking, we will be free to design and implement creative solutions to the challenges we face that will surprise and delight us. Our global shift from stagnation to inspiration will transform the world.

These keys work equally well for transforming our personal lives. Our daily difficulties, from holding the wrong job (or not having one at all), to fighting with our spouse, to lacking love, to financial worries, spiritual emptiness, physical illness, or any of a million other troubles in between, all share with the global challenges now facing our species a single deep, common root – *our beliefs about reality.*

Whether we are aware of it or not, we experience every moment of our lives within the framework of a complex set of personally-held beliefs about what reality is, how it functions, who's in charge, what is possible within it – for ourselves, of course, then often with a very different set of standards for others – plus a long, long list of accepted limitations, of what is never, ever possible for ourselves or anyone around us. These beliefs about reality are so deeply ingrained and all-encompassing that we live within their enveloping embrace much the way we bustle all day long through a thick blanket of air and light and humidity and sound, but call it "empty space," going about our lives largely unaware that we have any set beliefs about reality at all. We think reality actually is the way we have come to define it, that it's the same for everyone, everywhere, and that it would continue to be that way if we, personally, stopped breathing and seeing and sweating and listening tomorrow. We've got the world all figured out, and within the context of how we understand things to be, choosing amongst the limited options that context makes available to us, we build the best lives for ourselves that we can.

Some people wind up princes, and some paupers. Some build empires while others destroy them. Some find love while others are lost to loneliness and rejection. Observed outcomes of behavior often contradict our expectations regarding what is "right" or "good" or "fair," as when obviously "bad" people make fortunes bilking folks we consider "good," or when the promised freedom of material prosperity winds up imprisoning us behind steel bars of busyness, overwork and debt. But when faced with such contradictions, we most often hold even faster to our beliefs, rejecting the evidence of our senses and refusing to believe that things really are as they appear. Surely the "bad guy" will get it in the end, or maybe those "good people" aren't so good after all. And, of course, if we just work a little bit harder, it's all bound to pay off in the end…

If you take only one thing away from this book, let it be this: Nothing – *not one single thing* – that you currently believe about reality is true, at least not in any pure sense. Our deeply held beliefs, especially about limitations – our own, other people's, or those binding the larger reality we all participate in – make up the confining walls, floor and lid of the claustrophobic boxes we have been thinking in for most of our lives, the very boxes out of which every problem in our lives has emerged.

And, to quote Albert Einstein, *we cannot solve our problems with the same thinking we used when we created them.* We need to unlock our boxes and break free of the concepts around which we have organized our lives to date. We need new minds.

This is a book of keys. Use them to open your "belief box" and set your mind free, and your problems will be transformed. Looking at our lives with new minds, we will come to see as obvious many exciting, creative solutions to puzzles that once vexed us. We'll tap inner reservoirs of joy and satisfaction we never imagined could exist within us, yet there they were all along, waiting patiently just outside our boxes for us to discover them. Our personal shift from stagnation to inspiration will transform our experience of ourselves and the world.

KEY ZERO

There are actually 11 keys in this book – the ten keys advertised on the cover, plus a free bonus key I'm going to share with you right here at the beginning of the journey. I call this opening key *Key Zero* because, like the Hebrew letter Aleph, which, in Kabala, bears the numerical value of zero – the infinite, non-manifested emptiness out of which all manifestations arise – it both encircles and contains all the other keys, acting as both the beginning and ending points of the journey. Like a treasure map, all the destinations you will visit as you travel are contained within Key Zero, along with all the "X's" where you'll dig before you turn your sails homeward once again. Key Zero is a kind of psychological/spiritual catalyst, a fundamental, baseline statement about reality with the power to push the buried locks now limiting your worldview up into the light, and to enable the keys described in the chapters ahead to do their work of opening and release.

Key Zero is by no means original to me. If your journey to encountering this book passed through almost any variety of religious, spiritual, New Age, or even psychotherapeutic experience, study or practice, chances are you've heard it before – though you may not have taken it seriously at the time.

Pay attention – here it comes!

Right now, this very moment, you are asleep. Even if you are reading these words in broad daylight – sitting at your desk or beside the kitchen table, your feet firmly planted on the floor, eyes open, senses alert, feeling the weight of this book in your hands as sounds of life rise and fall rhythmically around you – you are deeply asleep, and dreaming furiously. The unique 3-D, Technicolor dream you are spinning around yourself is your life, with all its dramas, successes and failures, bliss and heartbreak, relationships, winnings, worries and woes.

Everyone else is asleep and dreaming, too. All our individual dream lives, taken together, create the world as we know it –

which, at least in part, explains why our global situation is always such a mess. Billions of people are dreaming private dreams, all the while mistaking their personal dream world for some external objective reality everybody else lives in, too. And no one understands why nobody ever seems to understand anybody…

This is not metaphor. This is fact.

Before you slam the covers of this book, thinking, *Oh no! Not that old New Age saw again…*, let me explain exactly what I mean by the word *dream*. You'll discover that this idea that we're all asleep and dreaming, and that our perception of the world around us is just plain wrong, is not only not far-fetched, its literal truth is supported by both of the great twin engines of human exploration of reality in our time – *Religion/Spirituality* and *Science*.

LIFE IS BUT A DREAM

At least some whisper of this core psychological truth lies at and unifies the deepest roots of all the world's Major Religions:

Aboriginal/Spiritist: According to Australian Aboriginal tradition, our world was dreamed into existence by godlike ancestors who now reside in the Sacred Dreamtime, the land we visit during our own nocturnal journeys, a realm by definition more real than our own for having given ours birth. Many indigenous African, Indo-European, Native American and other original culture spiritual traditions contain similar beliefs.

Buddhism: The Buddha taught:

Thus shall you think of all this fleeting world,
A star at dawn, a bubble in a stream;

A flash of lightning in a summer cloud,
A flickering lamp, a phantom, a dream.

– Diamond Sutra 32

Christianity: From the Bible:

Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.

– 1 Corinthians, 13:12

Hinduism: From the Upanishads:

This whole world the illusion maker projects out of this [Brahman].
And in it by illusion the other is confined.
Now, one should know that Nature is illusion,
And that the Mighty Lord is the illusion maker.

– Svetasvatara 4.9-10

Islam: The Prophet (SAW) once said: *"People are sleeping; only when they die do they wake up."* In his classic work, "*The Bezels of Wisdom,"* Sufi mystic Ibn Arabi expanded on this passage, adding that *"The whole of life is a dream within a dream."*

Verification of the physical reality of Key Zero is also to be found in the conclusions drawn by a growing list of modern scientific disciplines:

Quantum physicists tells us that reality is mostly vibrating empty space, sculpted on the tiniest scale by waves of energy in motion, by "uncertain," "fuzzy" and "spooky" subatomic particles that bubble up out of nothing and return to it in a "reality dance" bearing no resemblance whatsoever to the macro-world we experience with our senses.

Consciousness research proves that "the world," as we each uniquely perceive it, is but a virtual simulation wholly constructed within our individual brains, an internal representation of our immediate environment spun from waves of energy (light, sound, smell, etc.) gathered by our sense organs – a short-range, personal interpretation of reality that excludes many energies just as much a part of the makeup of our environment, such as ultraviolet and infrared light, magnetism or gravity, for which we have no physical sensory apparatus.

One important branch of evolutionary biology observes that we may all be little more than "meat puppets" for our DNA, "survival machines" so constructed by our "selfish gene" masters as to experience ourselves and our environment in whatever way works best to drive us toward successfully spreading our genetic materials far and wide across the landscape. If our personal (mis)-interpretation of reality grants us a procreative advantage, genes run with it – however deluded those interpretations of reality may be. Survival, not accuracy is the determinant.

The man behind "selfish gene" theory is a British biologist named Richard Dawkins. In the final chapter of his 1976 classic study of genetic evolution, *The Selfish Gene*, Dawkins hypothesized the existence of a new likely player in the grand drama of the human evolutionary journey – the *meme*. An amalgam of the Greek *Mimeme*, meaning, "something imitated," and the French word *même*, relating the new term to the function of memory, a meme (rhymes with gene) is, by its most basic definition, a unit of cultural information that is transmitted from one mind to another by way of words, imitated actions, written instructions, advertisements, etc.

Examples of memes sited by Dawkins include popular music, catchphrases, clothing fashions, artistic and architectural methodology, etc. Where genes "leap" physically from body to body through the vehicle of sexual reproduction, memes propagate between human brains by "leaping" from mind to

mind by way of imitation. He gives the example of one scientist encountering a good idea and sharing it with his colleagues, writing about it in professional journals, endorsing it in his lectures. Others take the idea to heart, similarly championing it within their own circle of influence, and soon the idea spreads exponentially to become commonly accepted "fact." This same pattern visibly drives the majority of human popular culture, politics and religious belief. Dawkins warns that such "leaping memes" should not be construed as mere metaphor, but as living structures within the brain, which, according to N.K. Humphrey, who reviewed an early draft of Dawkins' text, likely propagate in a way closely analogous to the method biological viruses use to parasitize the genetic mechanism of a host cell. Humphrey offers the example of the meme for "belief in life after death," which he sees as having literally parasitized the minds of billions of men and women the world over, generation after generation, for all of recorded history.

In the introduction to his landmark book *Virus of the Mind*, Richard Brodie greatly expanded on Humphrey's suggestion of the parasitic nature of memes, labeling them *mind viruses*, and concluding that they control an appalling percentage of human behavior and belief, accounting for everything from harmless fads like miniskirts and slang to such large-scale social ills as oppressive cycles of poverty, the appeal of youth gangs, and the success of Doomsday cults like the Branch Davidians or Heaven's Gate.

In the decades following the original publication of Dawkins' theory, a full-blown science of memes, called *memetics* (rhymes with "genetics"), has dramatically extended the original thesis, establishing a broad-based and respected theoretical and empirical science studying the replication, spread and evolution of memes. Exactly what memes are, and how they collaborate in our brains to create and direct our illusory experience of reality is the subject of the first six chapters of this book.

But to understand what I mean for the purposes of this exploration by the term *dream*, please take note in the brief discussion above that a meme is a thought or belief which enters our thinking through – most often unconscious – imitation, and which then lives independently, even parasitically, in our brains, thereafter influencing our every thought, choice, word and deed. We were not born with any of the opinions or ideas that currently shape our worldview. None of the "meaning" we assign to reality by way of our beliefs is intrinsic to who we, or the world, truly are – or at least were, before our memes got hold of us. It's all "added on" through imitation of the far-from-objective opinions, tastes, prejudices and beliefs of other human beings. Once inside our brains, memes weave an illusory world – and an illusory us (a notion we'll explore in greater depth when we survey Key Question #3, *Who Do You Think You Are?* in Part II of this book) – that we mistake, and usually fairly early in life, exchange for, the real world and selves we were born to know and be.

Thirty years of memetic research, at least a century of cumulative findings in physics, biology and a host of other sciences, and thousands of years of recorded human spiritual experience across the globe work together to support the understanding that every individual human being's experience of reality can be divided into two base components:

1. What we and the world really are, intrinsically, measurably, before any opinions, judgments, beliefs or even thoughts about ourselves or the world are added on.

2. What we think about that first component – our opinions, our beliefs, our assigned "meanings" – in short, our memes.

And memes are not intrinsic to either us or the world. They do not accurately describe the world or what is possible for us as living beings within it. They don't even try. As gene-like

entities with a "selfish" agenda of propagation in the "meme-pool," subjective categorizations like "fact" or "fiction," or the mental, emotional or physical impact of beliefs on the quality of our human lives are irrelevant to memes in the pursuit of their larger goal of getting copied and passed on. Memes are myriad and colorful threads of illusion that achieve their proliferation by weaving a sometimes beautiful, sometimes horrifying, but always false, or at least incomplete tapestry of pseudo-reality in our minds.

That tapestry is the dream I am addressing in this book. The unique pseudo-reality in each of our individual brains is the dream of our life. All of our individual pseudo-realities working together spin the dream of the planet. Real reality is what's left when we awaken from both.

Life is but a dream – a literal, meme-woven, hypnotic dream from which we must choose to awaken if we wish to achieve true personal freedom, see global transformation occur in our lifetimes, and reclaim our ultimate cosmic destiny as human beings before the illusory ills listed at the beginning of this chapter succeed in snuffing out our dormant potential.

This book contains keys to awakening. Awakening from our personal dream shatters the solid "box" of limitation memes have built around our lives, and frees us to fluidly craft our personalities, environments, relationships, careers, etc. as an artist paints a landscape or a sculptor teases form from formless clay. All of us awakening together from the shared dream of the planet will mark the birth of our species out of our current global nightmare of decline into a limitless future literally beyond our present ability to imagine, even in our "wildest dreams," indeed.

Chapter 2

MEMES, DREAMS AND THE WAY THINGS SEEM

Your perfect, beloved child, who you have nurtured for her first five years of life to feel intrinsically loved and valued, deeply rooted in tradition and family, and whose angelic features, bright mind and sterling manners have long reflected back to you your own best ideal self starts school. Outside your direct influence for the first time, she begins to change before your eyes. Little sermons long ignored when preached by you ("No running indoors!" or "Cover your mouth when you cough!") come home embraced because that celestial goddess – your child's first teacher – has at last made them compelling. Other beliefs you're not so sure you care for – kindergarteners led in religious, New Age or "politically correct" songs or activities, or taught to label your perfectly legal cigarettes or wine with dinner "drugs" – drag home alongside the "good" ones, flowing in a steady, daily stream from that same irrefutable bully-pulpit.

By seven, peer pressure brand-consciousness sets in, and your child who once thrilled over hand-me-downs and yard sale finds now blanches at the site of clothing labels not directly tied to a "cool" store in the Mall – even if she's never been to that store, or the Mall, for that matter, in her life.

By nine, the words of boy singers and girl actresses become the arbiters, not only of fashion, where their unblemished faces seem to infinitely populate T-shirts, posters, tabloids, TV, etc., but of morals, decency, and the rules for measuring social status and self-esteem, as well. Words come tumbling out of your child's mouth that shock or impress you, then hours or days later, while innocently channel-surfing, you overhear the same words spoken by a character you don't like on a TV show you consider too advanced or trashy for your child, and which you have banned from viewing in your home.

Has she been watching the show behind your back? Is she imitating her school friends, whose less responsible parents allow them to imbibe such garbage and then parade offensive values in the classroom? Is the teacher to blame? Society at large? Who stole your little cherub and left this obnoxious and confusing alien being in her place?

Memes did it. In fairness, the angelic, mannered five year old you so innocently entrusted to the public school was also a product of memes – your memes, the ones you value in yourself and society, and with which you worked hard to systematically infect your child from birth. What happened when she started school is a classic example of Darwinian competition. Your memes encountered powerful memetic challengers for the environmental niche of your child's expanding mind, and for all immediate appearances, yours lost.

In the long run, the trend will probably right itself. Statistically, the vast majority of adults the world over profess the same basic values, like religious beliefs and political affiliation, as their parents, while few would likely be able to even recall the names of the teen stars of their youth, much less ascribe any lasting effects to their influence.

But what new challenges will the fifth grade bring? What of junior high and high school? How much more of this unpleasant "competition" are you going to have to fend off? Who will protect your child when she grows up and leaves home

someday? How can you teach her to stand strong against destructive memes and attain personal freedom in a world of viral thoughts out to parasitize her mind…?

You must start by freeing yourself.

But before you can free yourself from the negative impact of destructive memes, you must first understand what memes are and how they work. The rest of this chapter presents a bare-bones Memetics 101 crash course which will provide you with all the information you need to move ahead with this book, though, as a general overview, it is by no means designed to explore every dimension of the subject.

REPLICATORS: GENES, MEMES, PRIONS AND COMPUTER VIRUSES

Genes are the best known example of a very specialized class of entity in nature that scientists refer to as *replicators*. What makes replicators so special is that they have the uncanny ability to construct copies of themselves without diminishing their own material resources in the process. Genes, memes, and other replicators like prions, and even computer viruses "grab" materials outside themselves and, in true godlike fashion, shape them in their own image.

Genes are comprised of long segments of double-helixed DNA which "grab" proteins to help their spiraling, ladder-like structures split right down the middle like a zipper – at which point each "unzipped" half "grabs" free nucleotides found in the nucleus of your body's cells to "fill in the blanks" along each open row of "teeth," resulting in two identical copies of the original gene. The rare, but inevitable, error in the copying process is called a mutation, and can lead to defect, death and disease in the organism, as well as to successful biological evolution, depending on how well the changes wrought by the mutation mesh with environmental conditions. Most mutations

are negative, jeopardizing survival rather than enhancing it, most often disabling or killing the effected organism before it has a chance to reproduce and pass the new genetic pattern on to future generations. Only very rare mutations that enhance survival get passed on and established, which explains why biological evolution is such an excruciatingly gradual process.

Prions are chemically normal protein molecules that have become twisted into a disease-causing *shape* – a shape into which they then fold other healthy protein molecules they succeed in "grabbing" along their travels through your body, thus replicating their function rather than their substance. But the effect is the same. Where there was one prion, now there are two, and the first is not diminished in the process. It is free to continue its journey, copying itself again and again, as are its progeny. Diseases caused by prions, such as Mad Cow Disease, spread quickly and are nearly always fatal.

A computer virus "grabs" the memory and information processing resources of your personal computer to carry out whatever nefarious task it was designed to perpetrate, like erasing your hard drive or downloading stored credit card numbers, and then again to copy and disperse itself to everyone you know by way of your email address book, shared USB thumb drives, or other technological means.

And memes, finally, make sometimes precise, often profoundly erroneous copies of themselves by "jumping" from brain to brain. A pattern of thought in my mind makes a copy of itself in yours when I express it to you with sufficient enthusiasm, anger, righteous indignation, eloquence, promise of pleasure, etc. to "make an impression" on your thinking. The original thought stays, undiminished, in my mind, while at the same time synapses in your brain rearrange as if by magical compulsion to reflect as much of my idea as you paid attention to and understood.

The more exciting my idea is to you, the more accurately it will be copied in your brain, and the more likely you will

become to tell others about it, thus spreading the meme. Then, if exponential dispersal of the meme sets in, it can explode across a town, a state, a nation, a gender, a generation, or even the whole globe in an expanding "idea epidemic," referred to by memeticists as *thought contagion*. Such thought contagions throughout history account not only for fads and fashions, but for mass belief in general – for every religion, political ideology, economic system, cultural custom, behavioral/moral code etc. since the birth of humankind.

Read the final sentence of the previous paragraph again, this time making careful note of your subtle physical, emotional and mental reactions to what is being said here. For some, the thought that their personally-held religious or political beliefs might be the result of contagion from an outside source is so repulsive that they have gone to great lengths to ridicule and even suppress the study of memetics as an empirical science. If the hairs on the back of your neck are standing at attention and you find yourself growing irritable as you read this chapter, you may be among their number. Others will accept the concept of thought contagion with a thin smile and a smug nod of the head, never acknowledging, even to themselves, how quickly their minds moved upon encountering the idea to gently exclude their own most cherished beliefs from the mix – "Of course, my beliefs are facts! But that nonsense everybody else believes… Now those are memes!"

Remember this book's core thesis from Chapter 1 – *Nothing that you currently believe about reality is true.* It's all memes, hypnosis, illusion. All of it.

But it's a very convincing illusion. It seems impossible even to imagine what reality might be like beyond our personal beliefs, opinions, prejudices, likes and dislikes, even if we intellectually acknowledge that shedding such imitated "add-ons" may be the price we have to pay to awaken from our dreams and achieve personal and planetary freedom.

Reality just seems so… *REAL…*

As fellow replicators, genes and memes have a great deal in common. But it is in examining their differences that we can begin to see why our illusions might be so compelling.

WHAT GENES DO

For all their complexity, with roughly 30,000 genes combined along three billion spiraling stair-steps in the human DNA molecule, the genes that craft our bodies from zygote to old age are capable of impacting us in only two ways – by shaping physical characteristics of our bodies (including predispositions toward certain diseases, behaviors, etc.), and by enhancing or interfering with the sensory equipment (eyes, ears, nose, tongue, skin) through which we absorb information from our external environment.

Genes determine our appearance, how well our organs work, whether the chemicals in our brains are balanced or out of whack, how much pain we can tolerate, the intensity of our sex drive and emotions, etc. These are the building blocks of our *internal physical environment*.

They also determine how we will experience color (is my "blue" the same as yours?), if we will see at all, the range of our hearing, the sensitivity of our ability to smell and taste and touch the world around us. Will we enjoy fine foods, or find everything bland? Will a gentle touch excite us or cause pain? The senses allow signals from outside the physical body to reach our brains as usable data for the construction of our personal virtual simulation of reality. Sense organs are the doorways to our *internal sensory environment*.

To use a computer metaphor, our genes provide us with remarkable "hardware" – complex bodies capable of interacting intimately with our environment, and big brains with which to process and internally model sensory input. But they provide darned little in the way of "software" with which to operate

those big brains, beyond a fairly static set of instinctual drives – hunger, thirst, sexual arousal, an aggressive fight or flight response to perceived threats, etc.

WHAT MEMES DO

Back in Humanity's prehistoric Golden Age, those instincts provided plenty of guidance for accomplishing such essential tasks as plucking ripe fruit from the trees or curling up in soft grass for a nap. But, as groups of humans began encountering one another and competing/cooperating over territory and resources, life gradually became too complicated for basic instincts alone to successfully oversee. Alternately, the leap from social simplicity to genetically-challenging complexity may have occurred in an instant, measured in geological time, as a consequence of rapid climate change or some similar planet-wide environmental disaster. Exact details of how the change took place are lost to history, but there is little question that, sometime early in our development as a species, a measurable transformation from simplicity to complexity occurred, presenting emerging Humanity with a watershed crisis of consciousness.

Continuing with the computer metaphor, human brains facing this new level of complexity would compare to top of the line PCs, loaded with memory, with modems, ports and drives sticking out every which way for absorbing information, but with insufficient processing power to tell them how to use that data to construct a safe and sensible internal model of the new environment. Instinct does a fine job of managing our fight or flight response to the approach of an obvious predator like a lion, but what if the "predator" is another human being, maybe one who is smiling and offering food as he approaches, or, to use modern imagery, a politician shaking hands, kissing babies, and

making promises along the campaign trail? Confusion in such moments can carry a high evolutionary price.

Our senses channel a fairly narrow range of available signals from our external environment to our brains, which then construct internal 3D simulations of the outside world that we experience as physical reality. As the complexity of our physical and/or social environment surpassed our ability to accurately process incoming information, and therefore to successfully model and respond to the outside world, memes "came to the rescue," insinuating themselves into our mental processes as "software" running on the genetically-provided "hardware" of our big human brains, granting us a previously unknown ability to compare, sort and prioritize incoming signals by assigning them, and the virtual products our brains weave them into, *meaning*, both on the small and large scale. Memes became the building blocks of our personal psychic reality.

WHEN MEMES COME TRUE

If we're honest, we have to admit that most of us live our daily lives as if psychic reality does not exist. We each experience the unique 3D simulation of reality generated inside our individual brains as if it were physical reality itself, a separate, self-contained world "out there" we move around within, but over which we have little or no direct control.

The truth is that our individual simulations of reality are at all times a mix of hard data we collect about the outside world through our senses and what we think that data means, how it seems to relate to past experiences, to things we've read or seen or heard others talk about, etc.

When I look across my office and see an empty chair, I see not only a boxy stick-structure of wood and cloth, but the concept of "chair," as well, an object whose purpose is for human beings to sit on comfortably. Its position beside the open office door adds

to that conception an element of hospitality and welcome; the chair is waiting for someone to enter the office and sit down, perhaps to chat or do business. It actively invites passers by my door, who share the "chair meme" and understand its unspoken message, to stop in, sit down, say hello, start a conversation, thus communicating something about my friendly, open personality that a gray metal filing cabinet standing in the exact same place would not. A large rock or whiskey barrel would work just as well to provide seating, but neither would be appropriate in an office setting. They would violate the "professional office" meme, and everyone who shares that meme would recognize the inappropriateness of such an object in that setting.

Consider my office chair from the point of view of a newborn infant, then a toddler just learning to walk, then a three year old child. To the infant, the "chair" you and I see is not yet even the stick-structure of wood and cloth referenced above, for "stick," "wood" and "cloth" are as yet unknown quantities to its mind. To the toddler, "chair" is an obstacle to crawling, a prop for pulling himself up to a standing position, a place of "Mamma," "lap," "story time," etc. The three year old knows "chair" much as you and I do, perhaps without the subtle nuances of invitation and welcome. A chair is for sitting. He sits.

All the elements that make up the adult understanding of "chair" must be learned by a growing child, one at a time, through studied imitation of the words and behaviors of older humans in the child's environment. These elemental learned concepts are memes. As he acquires more memes, the child's concept of "chair" will expand, and in some ways contract, as well, as when "chair" ceases to be an obstacle to crawling because the child now walks. Like a jigsaw puzzle, he will add, subtract and rearrange the memetic pieces many times, with a remarkable mental dexterity most readily available to us in our formative years, until his conception of "chair" aligns closely enough with that of older children and adults around him that no one notices any glaring discrepancies.

At which point, his perception locks into place. "Chair," as he has come to understand it, becomes, simply, chair, free of quotation marks. It becomes a steady component of his personal reality, a rock-solid, totally convincing illusory mix of external signals and internal memes he will seldom, if ever, be called upon to question again. By the age of five, he will have forgotten all the work involved in acquiring his present conception of "chair," and there will simply be chairs in the world.

MEMES WITHIN MEMES WITHIN MEMES

My office chair is an example of an individual meme, with its own separate life and influence, but it is simultaneously a *memeplex* – an element of our physical/psychic reality mix which, under closer examination, can be subdivided into a variety of smaller memes, much the way compounds are composed of linked molecules, which are, themselves, made up of combinations of atoms, which can be further subdivided into protons, neutrons, electrons, quarks, gluons, all the way down to the spookiest phantom particles of quantum physics. The "chair" meme allows us to identify furniture intended for seating in almost any environment. But the "chair" memeplex is, itself, composed of "sticks" plus "wood" plus "cloth" plus "sit" plus "comfort" plus "welcome" and on and on and on, each of these elements memes in their own right.

Dozens more individual memes are involved in the making of this single object, some of them wholly unique to me or to the person entering my office for a chat. The "chair" I offer a visitor may include, in my personal "chair" memeplex, great feelings of pride and love because, as a small child, I often stood on chairs to help my mother chop vegetables and roll cookie dough on the kitchen counter. The "chair" my visitor accepts may, in his personal "chair" memeplex, include large helpings of fear and frustration, reflecting his mother's long struggle to control her

child's natural exuberance with frequent banishings to the dreaded "time out chair." While our adult conceptions of "chair" will likely be sufficiently compatible that we will both, without hesitation, agree that I am offering him a seat and he is accepting, his "chair" and my "chair" are really not the same chair at all.

In exactly the same way, the "me" he has come to speak with is not the "me" I know myself to be, sitting across from him. The "him" I see before me bears little resemblance to how my visitor experiences himself in his own reality simulation. I have entered into his dream, and he has entered into mine. Once he is comfortably seated, we are going to have a conversation and make decisions together that may dramatically impact the future success or failure of the company that employs us, maybe even the fate of whole nations or the globe, if we are world leaders.

Imagine now every object, person and institution in your life – *book, house, car, movie, computer, clothing, phone, spouse, child, boss, friend, neighbor, stranger, pet, career, all your political, religious, social and cultural affiliations…* Each of these elements of your personal reality is as internal and illusory as my office chair. The world you have until this moment labeled "real" is almost entirely composed of memes, not things. What every human being calls "reality" is in actuality a highly-individualized personal memeplex composed of smaller memeplexes and individual memes wrapped like the shell of a mammoth oyster around a tiny, glistening pearl of "meaningless" environmental information taken in by our senses – "meaningless" in the sense that our eyes and ears and nose and tongue and skin relay raw data to our brains, free of judgments or prioritization. Our senses read the "plain text" of our environment within the physical boundaries set by our genes. Memes and memes alone spin that text into a story.

TO SERVE MAN

You may be thinking, at this point, "What's so bad about memes? Sounds like we couldn't even think without them!"

You're right. When we use the word "think," we most often refer to the act of comparing one memory to another or measuring present moment perceptions against past observations – *Does this idea make sense in the context of other things I already know/believe? Is this new situation like one I have experienced before? How did I react then? Should I repeat that response, or try something new?* – and without memes, we couldn't do that. Remember Richard Dawkins' connection of the word meme to memory. In much the same way that an armory is a storehouse for arms and other military equipment, human memory can be viewed as a storehouse for memes. Our personal memories reflect the millions of memes we have absorbed during our lifetimes, and which link together in multilayered, interlocking memeplexes to create our individual dream worlds. "Thinking," as we normally conceive of it, is a memetic operation, centered in memory and the consequent illusion of our lives as a single unbroken story, with a unique past, present and future, a meaningful beginning, a middle and an end.

Without such illusions, our dreams would dissipate and we would likely find ourselves eternally "stuck in the present" – which, it seems important to point out, is exactly where most schools of religious/spiritual mysticism are designed to lead us, beyond the "thinking trap," back to the present moment, to mindfulness, awakening, to *being here now!*

Without question, the physical evolution of the human species has selected in favor of meme-susceptible brains. The ability of such brains to generate fully-engaging, three dimensional internal story worlds, with their possessors as the focal character, has enabled our species to adapt with lightning speed, compared to the snail's pace of genetic evolution, to changes in our physical environment, and to create a social milieu allowing frequent

opportunities to gratify our instinctual sex drives, and for our offspring to survive to do the same, thus advancing the cause of our genes – proliferating into future physical generations. The ancient, symbiotic relationship of genes and memes seems, at first glance, to be an obvious win-win for human beings.

Until we factor in that we are not players in that relationship. As replicators, genes and memes have an agenda all their own – getting copied – that has nothing to do with us as individuals. Being "taken over by desire" and copulating against one's better judgment (the oft-heard, *"…it just happened…"*) shows genes manipulating the individual, through instinct, toward their goal of genetic replication, with potentially disastrous personal and social consequences for the individual. A terrorist suicide bomber is a good example of memes sacrificing their human carrier in the service of reaching potentially thousands or millions of fertile minds when the event is covered on TV news, publicly condemned by politicians, or applauded from the pulpit.

These are obviously extreme examples, but if we examine our day to day, ordinary experiences closely, we can quickly discern dozens of daily memetic interferences draining our energy and diverting us from the pursuit of our ideal experience of life. We may stir up bad blood with our spouse or coworkers by parroting political ideologies we've heard discussed on the radio or TV, without ever questioning why we suddenly find ourselves so committed to viewpoints we had never previously considered. We may take offense at an overheard conversation in the workplace concerning religious values, sexual mores or a "hot button" political issue like abortion, and find ourselves alienating our coworkers by interrupting to insist on the righteousness of our own view, or changing our behavior toward the speakers by, say, avoiding someone who might have proved an important ally in the advancement of our career goals. Our idealized "perfect man" or "perfect woman" meme may be our chief roadblock to achieving real human intimacy. Abused

children frequently carry the "trust no one" and "love equals violence" memes well into adulthood, often recreating in their adult relationships the very chaotic family dynamic they longed as children to escape.

On a global scale, memeplexes shared by large numbers of people – religions and political ideologies topping the list – too often lead those under their influence to wage Crusades and Jihads, to perpetrate genocidal "ethnic cleansing," or to unapologetically design, create and stockpile "doomsday weapons" like hydrogen bombs or wildly virulent germ warfare agents in mad attempts to "win hearts and minds," or in hopes of wantonly destroying as many human brains infected with competing memes as possible.

Good, bad or indifferent, useful or destructive, there is no escape from the simple fact that memes serve memes, not human beings. Like genes, memes serve the singular goal of their own replication, without regard to the happiness, health or wellbeing of their carriers – *us*. This is true of all memes and memeplexes, large and small, whether they lead us to success or destruction, to riches or poverty, to comfort or chaos.

And when we go unquestioningly along for the ride, blindly confusing our meme-generated dream world with "reality," our beliefs with "facts," and labeling our altruistic or destructive meme-programmed behaviors "choices" – or worse, "callings" – we are serving their goal, as well.

NOTE: The heading of this section, *To Serve Man*, refers to a classic Twilight Zone TV show episode from 1959, in which visiting aliens are naively embraced as having Humanity's best interests in mind because their "Holy Book" bears the very flattering title *"To Serve Man"*– but only too late is it is discovered that "To Serve Man" is, in fact… a human cookbook! What a great metaphor for the real-life relationship between memes and human beings! Don't be fooled by appearances!

BEYOND MEMES

While it is true that we cannot think, as we have come to conceive of "thinking," without the help of memes, and that our gene-driven physical evolution as a species has selected in favor of meme-susceptible brains, we should not necessarily conclude that such "thinking" is therefore a natural or ideal human state, or that the product of such "thinking" – the apparent inviolability of our individual and collective dream worlds – is as close to an unencumbered experience of reality as we can hope to achieve.

At some early point in our species' long evolutionary journey, a watershed increase in social complexity, rapid changes in our physical environment, or some similar event genetic evolution was just too slow to handle created a situation in which letting memes do our "thinking" for us became advantageous to our physical survival. This triggered natural selection to favor meme-susceptible brains over those capable of a very different mode of thinking altogether – a meme-free, wide-awake, directly-perceptual present-moment mode of cognition which I propose remains the natural and achievable birthright of every human being who is willing to do the work necessary to reclaim it.

In designing our big human brains, genes provided "hardware" for experiencing a much larger, more vastly complex reality than anything our dream worlds can even begin to hint at. The primeval "unholy alliance" between genes and memes surely allowed us to survive physically into the present, but at a price beyond imagination – the exchange of the real for the illusory, of clear, awakened minds for groggy sleep, of the organic "wild" freedom of direct perception for the "tame" and externally-imposed domestication of human culture.

The core hypothesis of this book is that there exists in real, physical, biological reality, beyond all the cultural, religious, ritualistic or sentimental New Age trappings in which whispers

of its existence have been smothered for millennia, a mode of human brain functioning – which includes the total mental, emotional, spiritual and even physical dimensions of our lives, as these are all directly controlled by our brains – that is in every way different from the ersatz meme-dream we have accepted in its place.

I further propose that the attainment of this secondary available mode of cognition, which has been referred to throughout history by such terms as "enlightenment, "satori," "salvation," and "sainthood," and which for the purposes of this book I label simply "awakening," has been reported throughout time, in every clime and culture, with sufficient frequency that we can consider its existence to be, at the very least, highly probable and potentially verifiable. This book is my attempt to clarify the real-world steps, stripped of cultural memetic embellishment, by which individuals can verify the reality of enlightenment for themselves by personally attaining an awakened state of consciousness.

My third and final conjecture – and this one is pure speculation, as I know of no means for verifying its truth in the present, though it seems very likely to me that it will be proven out by our future evolution as a species – is that the aforementioned long past moment when allowing memes to do our "thinking" for us became advantageous for our physical survival was a temporary crisis in the face of which memes allowed us to successfully adapt in the moment, but which culminated in the long term derailment of our natural evolution as a species. Whatever those ancient, dramatic changes were, when the environment stabilized and life returned to normal, we not only failed to throw off the influence of our parasitic mental "saviors" and return to our "right minds," we became so deeply and hypnotically captivated by the flattering, self-indulgent dream worlds our memetic handlers made available to us that we forgot about their existence altogether. Whether by choice or simple weakness, we were transformed in the aftermath of that

fateful crisis into a parasitized host species. The reclamation of our birthright, and of our true evolutionary destiny, depends on our remembering now what was then forgotten, on our winning now the battle our ancestors lost, or simply failed to wage.

You don't have to take my word for any of this – in fact, I encourage you not to. You cannot escape the bonds of meme-sleep by simply adding more memes to your personal grand memeplex, or by championing any one meme as superior to all others and following it blindly. Such efforts can only embroil you more deeply in the drama of the dream, carrying you further and further from real awakening.

I encourage you, instead, to accept the hypotheses above, not as facts, but simply as possibilities worthy of consideration and experimentation, and to apply your own efforts to carrying out the awakening exercises outlined in this book. If the hypotheses prove correct, you will verify them for yourself by achieving personal awakening and gaining freedom from memetic control. In your awakened state of consciousness, you will enter a new path of evolution, and find yourself uniquely positioned to lead others toward this same alternate destiny, to the benefit of all Humankind. If, on the other hand, the hypotheses prove false, you will have read a few pages and wasted a little time – time that would have passed anyway.

You have nothing to lose but illusions, and a literal new world to gain. Are you ready?

The work of achieving liberation from memetic parsitization begins with the intentional and systematic release of memes from our brains, and the gradual loosening of their power to shape our experience of reality. Acknowledging that we are, in fact, asleep and dreaming, and choosing to consciously restore the quotation marks around every "certainty" we have to this moment held dear is the first step toward achieving this freedom.

Chapter 3

WAKING UP

Like dormant and long forgotten seeds, instructions for awakening from the meme-dream can be found planted deep within time-honored and non-traditional religious and spiritual memeplexes the world over, from the drumming, ecstatic trances and healing journeys of indigenous shamans, to the simple grace of the Buddhist Noble Eightfold Path, to Hindu Yoga, Sufi dances, Christian monastic disciplines, and even such modern "ways" as psychological counseling, the Gurdjieff "Work," or the openly occult teachings of the Theosophical Society or Wicca. But the fact that literally billions of individuals throughout history have embraced the external trappings of these teachings, with only a tiny fraction of those billions achieving true awakening through them, testifies to just how thoroughly distracting and burdensome the mythological, ritualistic, dogmatic, fundamentalist, and guilt-or-comfort-ridden memetic "belief-padding" encasing such deeper truths can become.

We should not be surprised. That's what memes do.

Remember that the agenda of all memes and memeplexes is their own replication. Until we awaken, our brains will continue to wrap all incoming and outgoing information in self-flattering layers of illusion, which then intermingle with other memes, adapting and evolving in our minds, bouncing back and forth between brains as we elaborate our beliefs to one another, and

snowballing around the seed of truth originally communicated. At the stage where the process balloons into a large scale memeplex (like every organized religion on earth), all instructions which might have empowered individuals to escape the parasitic power of memes have been deleted altogether, or so grossly over-shadowed that the lay-follower's chance of ever stumbling across them, or of recognizing them for what they are, if he does, is slim at best. Most often, at this stage of development, splinter groups still possessing seeds of true liberation are labeled heresy by the larger memeplex, and subjected to active persecution.

Taking a "meme's-eye view," the reason this is so becomes obvious. In exactly the same way that, for all the election year ballyhoo of politicians, no government can ever really outlaw taxes or eliminate bureaucracy without undermining the *raison d'etre* of its own existence, even the most "sacred" belief system can never lead its adherents to genuine freedom because it is never in the best interest of any memeplex to enable us to escape its power to control us.

Now that's another sentence that deserves a second reading:

It is never in the best interest of any memeplex
to enable us to escape its power to control us.

Take a few minutes to mull that thought over before moving on. Just as the core function of all government, under the rule of any political party or system, in every country on earth, is to collect money from its citizens (taxes) and systematically spend it (bureaucracy), so the central task of all beliefs, in a way that is wholly unrelated to their content, is to limit our freedom to know reality directly and think for ourselves, and never to make true psychic autonomy available.

The sole earthly environment in which memes can survive is a meme-susceptible human brain. Memes can no more afford to

pass on instructions for escaping meme-dependency than a fish could afford to teach classes on how to drain lakes.

It would be in the fish's best interest to insist at every turn that lakes cannot be drained, that all attempts to do so are foolhardy and destined for disaster, and that only the power of water (and lots of it!) can solve the world's problems. It would also be in the fish's best interest to preach that lake draining technology is by its very nature dangerous and occult, and that anyone showing so much as a mild positive interest in such technology serves evil, and should be killed or otherwise disempowered. If you listen closely, you'll hear a lot of metaphorically similar rhetoric being espoused by every one of the large scale memeplexes now battling for control of our planet's future.

Such beliefs serve no purpose beyond their own propagation, and the continued parasitization of Humanity. True freedom comes only when we drain the lake. When we awaken from our sleep, we cease to be meme-susceptible. The lake is drained, the parasites die, and we are set free. This mental transformation, referred to in the original Koine Greek of the Bible as *metanoia* (a term which literally means "change of mind," but which has been consistently mistranslated into English as "repentance"), by Buddhists as *Satori*, and by Islamic Sufi mystics as *presential vision*, both breaks the grip of familiar memes that have long controlled our experience of reality, and inoculates us against future infection, leaving newly encountered parasitic beliefs no doorway into our minds, or perch to cling to within them.

MEMES OF SLEEP

We are not asleep and dreaming because we are bad people. We are not "fallen," defective, degenerate or otherwise responsible, in a moral sense, for our present condition. The genes our parents contributed to the making of our bodies included

instructions for equipping us with meme-susceptible brains. The memes already possessing their similar brains directed them, under the best-intentioned illusion of "preparing us for life," powered by feelings of responsibility and love, to infect our brains with all the memes necessary to construct dreams matching the ones they were hypnotized as children to accept as the "real world." Their parents did the same to them, as did their parents before them, and their parents, and theirs, and so on, and so on, and so on, all the way back to that early crisis when memes first took the wheel of human thinking.

In the realm of religion, concepts like "original sin," or Humanity's "fallen nature" and "need for salvation" are all memes which, on the one hand, innocuously, name the feelings of weakness, frustration and vulnerability sleepwalking generates in our lives, allowing us to put words to the uneasy psychic dissonance we experience when the actual events of our lives lose coherence with our illusory expectations. On the other, far more insidious hand, these same memes *explain away* such feelings as a morally just aspect of human existence that can never be overcome via personal effort. We're "fallen" because some ancient ancestor "sinned," or because we're "made wrong," "broken," "sick" etc. Life sucks because we're bad. Our punishment is earned, whether by ourselves or another, and we have no recourse but to humbly await externally applied mercy.

By thus "blaming the victim," and by linking with "salvation" memes that identify supernatural intervention as the only remedy for what ails us, a meme found not only to Christianity but in a host of world religions, including a large segment of the New Age movement, if you substitute Mother earth, benevolent extraterrestrials or "ascended masters" as the intervening agent, the greater memeplex insures its survival into perpetuity. Our memetic handlers permit us to acknowledge the genuine spiritual insight most adults eventually have that *something's gone terribly wrong here…*, and to cope with the unsettling emotions that naturally arise from such a revelation – but only

within a starkly meme-controlled, deceptive context in which nothing much can be done about our sense of disconnect from reality beyond more closely following the rules as written, and patiently awaiting divine intervention or physical death, whichever comes first. Through such self-referential circular theology, the memeplex reinforces adherence to its tenets as the solution to life's existential anxiety, rather than its cause.

Our intuition that *something's gone terribly wrong here* is correct, and our sense of disconnect from "real reality" is right on target, as well. But 99.9% of all the remedies religion, politics or cultural traditions have ever advised us to apply toward reconnecting with reality are memes whose sole agenda is their own replication. Beliefs themselves are our number one barrier to awakening.

WHY WE ARE SLEEPING

The simple truth is that we are sleeping because we lack sufficient energy to wake up.

Just as flesh and blood parasites thrive by draining the blood or other physical resources of their hosts, so memes consume our mental and emotional energy, leaving us just enough to slog along from day to day in a hypnotic state of psychic lethargy – but never enough, under normal circumstances, to become consciously aware of their existence as independent entities controlling our minds, or of the price we are paying for their continued survival.

While the commonly accepted myth that "we use only 10% of our brain" is, biologically speaking, a demonstrably false statement, this fiction captures in a pithy image our very accurate intuitive observation that, while we surely use 100% of the physical gray matter of our brains every day of our lives (for if we did not, in the frugal economy of Nature, the other 90% would not likely be there), we do so at far less than 100% of that organ's full potential.

With more computing power in our heads than the largest supercomputers on earth, most of us struggle to balance our checkbooks, do our own taxes, or follow a recipe. Most Americans, after finishing high school, never read another book, cover to cover, as long as they live. With no fewer or less-strategically-connected brain cells than Mozart, we eschew learning to read or write music, or to play the piano or any other musical instrument, because such activities seem "too hard." With the same mental capacity for philosophical insight as Aristotle, for wisdom as King Solomon, and for invention as Leonardo da Vinci, we feel helpless in the face of even mildly complicated moral challenges, avoid making decisions for fear of choosing poorly, and spend a disproportionately large percentage of our waking lives in dull servitude to corporations and governments, conforming to the externally-imposed social norms of our religion or community, and dissipating the hours available to us for creativity in utterly passive pursuits like watching TV.

Right this moment, just as we are, every healthy human brain on earth comes fully equipped to function with all the enlightened awakening of a Buddha, a Jesus or a Lao Tzu, or secularly, with the genius of an Albert Einstein, a Steven Hawking, a Beethoven or Michelangelo. Such dynamic awareness is our natural birthright as human beings – a birthright that has been stolen by our memes.

WAKING UP

If we had to wake up by sheer force of will, we would fail, because that's not how throwing off meme-sleep works. Many "spiritual casualties" along the path toward awakening – those bitter cynics who, at every mention of expanded consciousness or higher human potential, cry, *"Been there, done that! It's all B.S! Didn't work for me, so don't waste your time!"* – are where they are today, psychically, because they misunderstood this crucial point. So pay attention!

Meme-free, enlightened awakening, as defined in this book, is the natural state our brains functions in when parasites are not sucking them dry. We do not have to "attain" an awakened state of consciousness. Awakening happens of its own accord when we remove enough parasitic memes from our minds that the net gain in energy available to our brains – because memes are no longer consuming it – becomes sufficient to activate higher modes of functioning.

That's right, "modes," in the plural. Our brains work very much like a 3-way light bulb. At their lowest setting, our brains are, without question, 100% "on" and illuminating the area around, say, our reading chair – in other words, we are using 100% of our brains, but at minimum "wattage." Add just a little more power, and they leap to a brighter setting, throwing light halfway across the room – though they are no more or less "on" than before. Click the switch again, the wattage jumps, and we get a clear view of the far wall, maybe even the next room.

True awakening is a process of gradually stepping up the "wattage" available for running our brains by reclaiming energy currently being consumed by parasitic memes.

Berating ourselves for being asleep in the first place won't wake us up, nor will flooding our brains with so-called "consciousness expanding" drugs, pursuing puerile "guided journeys" to ever-more-illusory inner realms, surrendering our autonomy to one memeplex to the exclusion of all others, or even sitting cross-legged, propping our eyes wide open and shouting *"Wake up! Wake up!"* – all of which have parallels in today's religious/spiritual meme-marketplace.

The real work that brings about awakening, rather than merely granting the external appearance of "being spiritual," while actually embroiling us ever more deeply in the dream, is a rigorous, daily commitment to the identification and elimination of every self-serving belief from which our personal dream-lives are constructed.

Unweave the tapestry of the dream, and awakening happens.

Chapter 4

STAGES OF AWAKENING

From our first gentle stirrings that things may not be as they seem, to our personal enlightenment, to the eventual awakening of the whole of Humanity and our quantum leap as a species into a shared destiny beyond present human imagining, waking up from the meme-dream of life is a gradual process with at least four broad but clearly discernable stages.

STAGE ONE: INDIVIDUAL-SLEEPING (PEACEFULLY)

I have labeled the first stage of awakening, the stage at which the vast majority of Humanity functions on a daily basis, *Individual-Sleeping (Peacefully)*. This is the stage of the meme-possessed dreamer, sleepwalking through life, perhaps having mildly, or even profoundly, experienced the insight that *something's gone terribly wrong here…* regarding the state of the world or of their individual lives, but still mostly satisfied to blame themselves or others for perceived inequities, thus enabling them to remain reasonably attached to, and comfortable in, pseudo-reality as they know it.

But *Individual-Sleeping (Peacefully)* is no simple state of mental stupor. The sleeping human brain is at all times incredibly active.

Every day, our brains pass through four levels of functioning, or states of consciousness, from the sleep of nighttime

dreaming Delta Consciousness, to the illusory waking dream of our normal daytime Beta Consciousness, to the timeless Alpha Consciousness of daydreaming, TV watching, relaxation and some forms of meditation, to the visionary, twilight state Theta Consciousness we pass through briefly as we fall asleep at night, and then again in the morning as we move back toward Beta. In each of these states of consciousness, our brains reshuffle the "reality deck," providing us with a very different experience of the world.

Think of waking, night dreaming, daydreaming and mystic vision modes of consciousness as similar "games" with wildly differing "rules." The rules define what shape the external sensory input and internal memes available to us in any given moment will take when our brains animate them into our personal 3-D, internal simulation of reality.

When we are in Beta Consciousness, our brains weave available stimuli into our daytime world of homes and families and jobs, and all their concomitant tedium or drama. In Delta Consciousness, the same stimuli generate the sometimes dull, often fantastic worlds of our sleeping dreams – we fly, fall from skyscrapers without dying, or meet creatures of legend. Twilight state Theta Consciousness can turn those very same stimuli into crystalline visions that make mud of ordinary dreaming, or physically awaken us to what appears to the eye in every way to be the solid, rational, waking Beta world, except with angels or aliens beside us, teaching great truths or perpetrating atrocities. In relaxed Alpha Consciousness, gentle whispers of insight guide us to reconsider our experiences of all the other states and intuit an overall "meaning" or "purpose" for our lives.

In each case, the "world" we experience is constructed from the same constituent parts – external information gathered by our senses (which includes bodily sensations, like digestion, itching or pain), mixed with memes, as "shuffled" according to the divergent rules of differing "games." Though science generally extols Beta Consciousness as the highest state for

measuring reality, with various religions/spiritualties elevating one or more of the others, in fact, no one Stage One reality simulation is more real, sacred or valuable than any of the others.

For the most part, we have been trained by our memetic domestication, which includes, in the West, the supremacy of science, to accept our daytime Beta perceptions as the only true description of reality, and never to trust the content of our nighttime dreams, intuitions received in moments of unfocused relaxation, or direct mystical experiences. But the truth is that all these states of consciousness, from deep dreaming to full wakefulness (in the ordinary, daytime Beta sense) are of the exact same substance. They are all aspects of the dream as defined in this book, meme-infected illusions spun up by possessed brains, which are in no way connected to, or accurately descriptive of, real reality.

At the *Individual-Sleeping (Peacefully)* stage of development, there are two important lessons we can draw from a careful consideration of our sluggish and deluded daily journeys through Alpha, Beta, Delta and Theta states of consciousness.

The first lies in applying the understanding that all four states, at this initial stage of awakening, are equally illusory to help discern the "bait" of scientific, pseudo-scientific, traditional religious and New Age spiritual memeplexes dropping daily lines into our "cranial lakes," seeking to reel us in for energetic exploitation. Taking anyone's side in the debate over which state of consciousness best describes reality is a pointless distraction from the real work of awakening. All such philosophical culture wars – logic VS feeling, religion VS science, prayer VS meditation, or the question of whether dreams, intuition or reason best reveal our "true selves," etc. – are memes battling memes, a lose-lose struggle from which we can never benefit by joining the fray. Observe all such "lures" through the lens of this understanding, and stay focused on the daily work of identifying and eliminating parasitic memes.

The second lesson to be found in a close study of our personal experience of Alpha, Beta, Delta and Theta states of consciousness lies in awakening to what we are missing. Using 100% of our brains (though at minimum "wattage"), passing every day through four wildly differing states of consciousness, we spend, at most, two thirds of the 24 hours in any given day in focused Beta Consciousness, the daytime waking state most people identify as the only real reality. Factor waking-hour, unfocused Alpha consciousness entertainment activities like watching TV, playing video games, listening to music and daydreaming into the mix and that percentage drops to half, a third, and often even less.

So, where did the rest of our lives go? Why do we remain, on a day to day basis, mostly oblivious to its absence? What are our brains up to while we look away? How much of our full potential as human beings lies unexamined and undeveloped behind this strange iron curtain of our own habitual inattention? A driving hunger to discover and reclaim this lost potential can become a powerful motivator rousing us from our peaceful Stage One slumber.

Freed from the constant energy drain of meme parasitization, our reenergized brains can become powerful tools for grasping and willfully crafting a personal and planetary destiny we cannot even begin to imagine while mesmerized by the static, lackluster dream of Stage One sleep. But so long as we remain content to disregard three of the four states our brains pass through every day, along with the time we spend in them, and to operate in the fraction of our lives we embrace as real with a 90% deficit in psychic energy (because memes are draining us dry), direct experience of such higher states of consciousness will forever elude us, no matter how many books we read, Masters we follow, or belief systems we try on like shoes in a department store, looking for something that will fit us just as we are.

"Just as we are," and, consequently, the world *"just as it is,"* is the dream. To awaken, we must change. Only by awakening can we change the world.

STAGE TWO:
INDIVIDUAL-SLEEPING (FITFULLY)

Stage Two: *Individual-Sleeping (Fitfully)* typifies the "seeker," the individual for whom the insight *something's gone terribly wrong here…* has twisted the world into an unnerving question mark. A person experiencing this stage continues to live his life pretty much as he did when he was sleeping peacefully, but without contentment. Recognizing on a deep level that things are not as they seem, that reality is a trickster, and finding himself unable to look away from the contradictions between his expectations and experience, or to ignore synchronicities or brief but transitory mystical visions, he wanders frantically through one illusory dreamscape after another, obsessively searching here, there and everywhere for THE ANSWER.

Whether as a consequence of ground-shaking life events, intentional introspection, an encounter with genuine, transformative truth, or even simple memetic imitation of other "seekers" or their writings, the fitful sleeper finds himself in the position of having at least partially seen through and broken the hold of his major childhood memeplexes, thereby liberating a measure of psychic energy memes had previously consumed. But he is so filled in their absence with existential anxiety, with not knowing what is valuable or how to conduct himself without the black and white guidelines his overthrown memes once provided, that he quickly proceeds to expend all his reclaimed psychic energy hopping from teacher to teacher, belief system to belief system, lifestyle to imitated lifestyle, wrapping himself ever more tightly in a warm blanket of promising new memes

until he finds his way back to a peaceful, comforting relationship with the dream.

Now he has "spiritual dreams," in which he plays the self-flattering role of the enlightened devotee, the guru, the sincere student of traditional or New Age wisdom. He may be the church-going "Prodigal Son" who, having wandered for a time from his "spiritual home," now breathes a contented sigh at returning to the familiar embrace of "God's family." Alternately, he may dream one branch of science, school of philosophy, alternate lifestyle or political or social movement promises to cure all the world's ills, and relax into the role of researcher, scholar, activist, organizer.

For a while, he is happy. But sooner or later his expectations and experience become sufficiently dissonant that the realization *something's gone terribly wrong here…* dawns again, his reverie is shaken, and the happy dreamer returns to tossing and turning, to overthrowing memes, to grasping franticly for replacements, to peaceful slumber in the comforting arms of new gods.

The difference between *Individual-Sleeping (Fitfully)* consciousness and genuine awakening is the difference between dreaming we are awake – especially on those nights when our bladders are full to bursting, and our dreams consist of passing one defective toilet after another as our frustration escalates – and actually opening our eyes, throwing off sheets and blankets, and taking care of business. The Stage Two dreamer's rhythmic oscillation between a wakefulness he can never quite secure and surrender to the dream that he can never long maintain robs him of peace in either realm. Millions of people spend their whole adult lives beneath the razor-sharp pendulum of restless Stage Two sleep, receiving painful, energy-draining cuts with every swing of the axe, psychic wounds of disappointment and betrayal that seldom find time to fully heal before the tortuous blade returns.

STAGE THREE:
INDIVIDUAL-AWAKE

Stage Three: Individual-Awake marks the first level of development that is recognizable as genuine awakening. The Stage Two "seeker" has intellectually and emotionally recognized the illusory nature of pseudo-reality, has unearthed working instructions for shaking off his personal meme-dream, and has managed, through their diligent application, to reclaim sufficient energy to verify reality's illusory nature through personal experience, and thereby to step his brain up to a permanently brighter level of illumination.

This is where the 3-way light bulb metaphor breaks down. Within the very broad spectrum of Stage Three Awakening, there are a potentially unlimited number of attainable intermediary "wattage-levels" that would all qualify as awakened, and individuals, once they have entered this Stage, will continue to grow, move and change amongst them in pursuit of continued evolution.

Stage Three is the realm of the Bodhisattvas, the Zen Masters, the Rinpoches, Yogis, World Teachers, Saints and Saviors produced, if only rarely, by every religious/spiritual tradition on earth. Any attempt to rank such individuals according to an externally-imposed system of relative value (Was Jesus more enlightened than Buddha? Was Paramahansa Yogananda more awake than Krishnamurti?) is a meme-inspired waste of energy, a pointless "my guru can beat up your guru" distraction that has all too often succeeded in derailing the unsteady quests of Stage Two "seekers."

What matters far more than measuring any difference in the specific "wattage" of historical or present day Avatars is identifying the one thing that every enlightened human being in every tradition and era has in common – a human potential as available to every person reading these words as it was to Jesus, Mohamed or Buddha. Having verified the illusory nature of

pseudo-reality through direct personal experience, the Stage Three individual's relationship to the dream is forever changed. Where the Stage One dreamer takes life at face value, never questioning the directions of his memetic controllers, and the Stage Two "seeker" accepts intellectually that there is more to life than meets the eye, but repeatedly fails to break through and experience his conjecture as real and convincing, the person entering *Stage Three: Individual-Awake* consciousness has done the work to cut away sufficient enslaving bonds of memetic control that he succeeds in crossing an irreversible energetic boundary into the world beyond the bubble of his personal meme-dream.

For the sake of clarity, let me spell out that this is not a crossing from one physical world, natural or supernatural, into another. It is a dramatic shift in the way the human brain perceives the one world we all share when supplied with sufficient energy to leap into a higher mode of functioning. The awakened individual directly perceives both external and internal reality as it is, beyond the limits set by his imposed memetic meanings, judgments or categorizations.

And what he finds beyond his personal meme-dream is the dream of the planet. Having awakened individually, the Stage Three human discovers the collective dream continuing just as it was, without so much as a pause for breath, running full-throttle all around him, and himself as unremittingly ensnared within it as he had been by his private dream...

Yet, nothing is the same. With Stage Three awakening come several critical enhancements to the individual's perception of dream "reality":

He is no longer at the center. While trapped within our personal dream-worlds, the ongoing narrative our brains weave from the sensory information coming into, and the memes possessing, our minds is inevitably *a story about us*. We are always personally center-stage in the dramas of our own lives, with what we think of as "the world" being a picture constructed by connecting the

tiny number of "dots" of information we perceive to affect us directly. Events not impacting us personally, we filter out or minimize, which is why a romantic breakup can be experienced as a world-shattering disaster, while an earthquake in a distant country that kills tens of thousands rates, at most, a charitable donation before vanishing altogether from our personal radar. We take in such distant events much the way we politely half-listen to the account of a friend's nighttime dream – once we have measured the relevance of the dream to our own lives (*Did my friend dream about me? What does the dream say about what he thinks of me?*), we seldom linger long on the narrative or change our beliefs or behavior based on what we've heard. Instead, we quickly return to our obsessive self-focus, perhaps recounting, in exchange, a dream of our own – to which our friend will, at best, politely half-listen…

In stark contrast, the newly awakened Stage Three individual, while he may not immediately perceive whether the collective dream possess a physical or psychic center at all, and if it does, quite where it lies, will, immediately upon making the leap from Stage Two to Stage Three consciousness, know one thing with crystal clarity. If a center exists, *it's nowhere near where he's standing!* He sees that the words and actions of other people, which he used to take so personally, have nothing really to do with him; people are acting out their own dreams and dramas, and relating to him largely as to a phantasm of their own creation. He recognizes that the great drama of the global dream, with all its violence and compassion, its political and economic upheavals, its brutal wars and passionate outcries for peace and justice rise and fall around him without reference to his personal existence, in no way concerned with his happiness or misery, and utterly oblivious to his individual fate.

Life becomes impersonal in a way which, to those still caught up in the self-involved flattery of individual dreaming, might appear to be unendurably cold. But, in fact, the exact opposite is true. The inarguable personal experience of his own miniscule

size and significance within the collective dream frees the awakened individual from all the previously unrecognized shackles in which believing himself to be the most significant being in the universe once held him. No more must he stay continually puffed up, investing most of his energy in defending his sense of self-importance. He no longer has to be God, or be like God, or even much think about God one way or the other. He knows that if such a being as God exists, only God's opinion of God matters anyway, so there's no point wasting precious psychic energy on such dalliances. He may laugh to remember how, while he slept, he dreamed of crashing heroically through the towering fortress of lower consciousness; now awake, he knows himself to be so small that, in reality, he has escaped psychic imprisonment by slipping, unnoticed, through the tiniest keyhole – a knowledge generating a gratitude and joy unparalleled in the personal dream-world he inhabited just moments before.

He is no longer controlled by memes. Having broken the hypnosis of Stages One and Two sleep, the awakened Stage Three individual sees memes for what they are, and because of it, they no longer have power over his mind. The dream of the planet continues around him, but he does not mistake it for objective reality. He knows it to be a collective dream spun up by billions of meme-possessed human brains, all acting out dramas largely beyond their control. He becomes, for the first time, capable of true compassion, free to echo Jesus' words from the cross, *"Forgive them, for they know not what they do,"* because he perceives as observable, objective fact that they do not. His heart breaks to witness the unremitting veil of suffering memes have wrapped around the whole earth, twisting every human being, and the natural world through human machinations, into damaged and diseased dream-caricatures of their full potential. His mission shifts from sole focus on achieving personal enlightenment to the larger goal of awakening the world.

He has gained the potential to willfully shape the dream. As he now knows the dream of the planet, in fact, to be a dream, so he recognizes every facet of his own self and life within that larger dream to be composed of "dreamstuff" as well, and therefore no longer subject to the limitations with which he once allowed memes to enshroud his understanding. Individually awake within the collective dream, he is freed to endlessly reinvent himself and the circumstances of his life. Reality becomes malleable in varying degrees, depending on his continued evolution within the spectrum of Stage Three awakening. At barest minimum, he is liberated to choose his own values and intentionally restructure his character in accordance with his goals and ideals. Where once he was weak, he assumes strength. Cowardice is easily transformed into courage, timidity into confidence, selfishness into compassion, foolishness into wisdom. At peak development, the collective dream's subjugation to his personal will makes available to the awakened Stage Three individual all the miracles and magic of legend, from the manifestation of physical objects out of thin air, to the power to calm storms, communicate telepathically, be in two places at once, walk on water or through walls, etc.

The persistence of the collective dream once his personal dream has ended reveals a great truth – all Humanity functions together as one interconnected "super-brain" that must awaken *en mass* before the dream of the planet can be dispelled. It hints, as well, at the existence of even larger organisms – the biosphere, the earth, the solar system, the Cosmos – in which humans may be complexly embedded, and from whose evolutionary cycles and destiny our species' fate can never be divorced. Inspired by this unifying vision, he commits himself to the pursuit of three simultaneous goals: *crafting an ideal physical life for himself within the planetary dream*, *maximizing his personal Stage Three evolution*, and *working ceaselessly toward the individual and mass awakening of his fellow human beings.*

STAGE FOUR: THE LIMITLESS FRONTIER

Many processes in Nature unfold in stages marked by clear "tipping points," a term popularized by author Malcolm Gladwell in his book *The Tipping Point: How Little Things Can Make a Big Difference*. Gladwell observed that incremental changes within a system tend to accrue without noticeable effect for long periods of time, until they surpass a certain critical threshold, at which point they "boil over" like hot milk in a saucepan, creating massive change that spreads with lightning speed in every direction at once, often wholly transforming the original system in an instant. We have already seen that the gradual work of identifying and eliminating parasitic memes from our individual brains follows the "tipping point" model, offering only slight benefit while we struggle, potentially for many years, to reclaim psychic energy in hopes of activating Stage Three consciousness, but then revolutionizing our entire experience of reality in a heartbeat once sufficient "wattage" is achieved.

I have named the Fourth Stage of awakening *The Limitless Frontier*, first, because it has yet to manifest on this planet, so any attempt to describe it in particulars would be purely speculative, thus making it, by definition, a true frontier. Secondly, if all Humanity functions together as one interconnected "super-brain," as the unifying vision of Stage Three awakening suggests, it seems reasonable to predict that the awakening of Humanity's communal "global mind" will follow a similar "tipping point" pattern as can be seen in the lives of individuals. Exactly what Stage Four consciousness – the mass awakening of Humanity, the permanent overthrow of our memetic parasitization, and the final dissipation of the dream of the planet – will look like when it arrives is anybody's guess. But we can reasonably anticipate, based on what we know about the evolution of individual consciousness, that it will likely involve an exponentially greater transformation of our experience of reality than we realized when transitioning from Stage Two sleep

to Stage Three awakening. So, just as our personal limitations are undone when we step-up the "wattage" powering our individual brains, so an awakened Stage Four Humanity can surely expect to discover, awaiting us beyond the "tipping point" of our collective human meme-dream, a truly electrifying horizon of limitless possibility to be explored. We will live in a new world where literally nothing is the same, a world in which the list of sad 21st Century global challenges with which this book began will melt away like a forgotten dream before the inspiring vision of our collective cosmic human destiny.

Our future looks bright, indeed!

But beyond this simple statement, there is little to be gained from any extended speculation into the presently unknowable. *The Limitless Frontier* will open to us when we reach it. It cannot be jumped to, skipping any of the intermediary stages. Before we can embrace Stage Four consciousness, all Humanity must awaken. Before all Humanity can awaken, we must each take responsibility for doing so individually.

THE SIMPLEST PATH

Everyone is familiar with the famous quotation attributed to Taoist sage Lao Tzu, *"The journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step."* In most areas of life, this ancient wisdom proves golden. But if we view the process of global awakening – defined as *the arousal of sleeping Stage One and Two humans to Stage Three awakening in sufficient number to surpass the global "tipping point" and awaken the world* – as a journey of a thousand miles, we are setting ourselves up for overwhelm before we even begin. When we imagine such a monumental voyage lying between us and the achievement of our goal, who could blame us for reconsidering that first step? For marching, instead, to the nearest meme-marketplace for a quick-fix of pseudo-enlightenment?

In truth, the journey from Humanity's present mass sleep to total global awakening is a journey of only two steps. Our future as a species depends on individual humans completing this brief passage millions, and potentially billions, of times before we reach our collective "tipping point," but the good news is that each of us, personally, must make the journey only once. And of the two steps involved, only one requires effort on our part.

Awakening may not be easy, but it is very, very simple.

Step One: Identify and eliminate the parasitic memes now controlling our minds, thereby reclaiming sufficient psychic energy to step-up our brains to awakened Stage Three conscious-ness. *The Simplest Path to Personal and Planetary Awakening: FREE YOUR MIND* is conceived as a bare-bones "how-to" manual for accomplishing that transition.

Step Two: Wait for the "tipping point." While we wait, there are lots of fun and interesting activities with which to occupy our time, including guiding others through their introduction to, and achievement of Step One, crafting the unlimited, ideal life our achievement of Stage Three consciousness makes available to us, and applying a variety of spiritual technologies drawn from religious, metaphysical and scientific traditions the world over, but stripped of their misleading memetic padding, to expand the scope of our personal evolution within the broad spectrum of Stage Three awakening.

Chapter 5

KILLING MEMES SOFLTY

In the preceding chapters, I have repeatedly labeled the work we must accomplish in order to transition from Stages One and Two sleep to Stage Three awakening *the identification and elimination of parasitic memes*, and used words like *die* to describe the final state of memes so eliminated. While such terms well-convey the emotional urgency driving our quest for psychic liberation, in order to proceed further, we'll need to sharpen our focus and explore in greater detail what actually takes place when we break the power of parasitic memes and memeplexes to control our minds.

DEAD OR ALIVE?

Like their cousins, the viruses, memes can never really "die," because they aren't really "alive" in the sense we mean when we say that we, our pet cat, or a blade of grass is alive. Memes are, by definition, patterns of information that use human brains both as host environments and as vehicles for accessing and getting themselves copied into subsequent minds, a mental modus operandi strikingly similar to the process by which disease-causing biological viruses infect our bodies.

A virus is a nasty example of DNA gone wrong. Unlike normal DNA, viruses lack the ability to copy themselves directly, so they "highjack" the inner workings of their victim's

otherwise healthy cells, causing them to generate so many copies of the original virus that the cell walls eventually burst, releasing all those viral replicants to spread throughout the victim's body and infect more healthy cells. Where illnesses caused by bacterial infection, such as Strep Throat, can be treated with antibiotics that literally kill bacteria (which are living, single-celled organisms), what makes viral infections notoriously difficult to treat is that the DNA they are made from is a chemical (deoxyribonucleic acid), and not an organism. You can't "kill" a chemical. What you can do, though, is interfere with its ability to reproduce.

Some antiviral drugs create reproductive interference by preventing viruses from injecting their genetic material into healthy cells. Others hinder the ability of the virus to attach itself to the cell in the first place, or of viruses that do connect to destroy the natural protein coat that protects cells from outside invasion. If we are healthy, our immune systems overcome the invaders by crafting antibody proteins tailored to the presence of specific bacteria or viruses infecting us. Antibodies surround and affix themselves to the intruders, simultaneously disabling their ability to harm us and making them especially "tasty" to a set of immune cells called microphages which love nothing better than to consume foreign materials they encounter inside our bodies – especially when those materials are coated with antibody molecules.

ANTI-MEMES

Memes infect us by imprinting our minds with foreign thought patterns that "highjack" our otherwise healthy brains, insinuating themselves into our personal internal reality simulations as "facts" bearing as much or more apparent validity as signals collected by our physical senses. A consciously cultivated awareness of this process and its reality-shaping

power over our minds can provide a strong defense against the hypnotic power of many daily, pop-cultural mind-invaders, such as the behaviorally coercive memes proffered by advertising, movies, hit music, political speeches, biased news reporting etc. Recognizing the veiled intent of such meme-sources and maintaining focus on our own psychic integrity in their presence can, in most cases, quite effectively block their infectious potential. But overcoming the larger, more deeply embedded memes and memeplexes that form the foundations of our personal meme-dreams – such as our family of origin's religious or political beliefs, our national/racial/societal traditions and values, our learned sense of self-worth (or lack thereof), the "rules" we accept concerning family or romantic relationships, etc. – requires the application of powerful, consciously-designed "anti-memes" metaphorically akin to the antiviral drugs described above.

This book represents one such consciously-designed anti-meme with the power to shake loose and dispel the hypnotic power of our deepest, foundational memes. Other well known, effective anti-meme systems include Zen Buddhism, which, historically, owes much of its meme-countering power to its unique, cross-cultural blending of Indian Buddhist philosophy and meditation practice with Chinese Taoism; the Scientific Method, when diligently applied to one's own mind and personality in addition to the physical Universe; and the Toltec path to liberation as espoused, somewhat obtusely (but, to be fair, most completely), by Carlos Castaneda, and in its simplest, most direct form, by Don Miguel Ruiz in his *The Four Agreements* books. Like their medical antiviral counterparts, all true anti-memes function by interfering in various ways with the internal and mind-to-mind reproductive cycles of the memes holding our personal dream-worlds together, culminating in the eventual collapse of the dream and our consequent liberation from illusion. Without stretching the biological virus metaphor too far, anti-memes can be said to break the power of memes by

inhibiting their ability to attach, or stay attached, as the case may be, to our minds.

GONE BUT NOT FORGOTTEN

This is not to say that memes so detached are physically killed or literally eliminated in the process. Coming to identify our childhood religious training or our parents' political viewpoints for the memeplexes that they are, for example, will not erase our memories of having once been True Believers ourselves, nor will it dull our ability to understand or articulate the creeds that once defined our reality. One central reason unweaving the memetic tapestry of our individual dream worlds requires the application of external anti-meme systems is that, while there are strong metaphoric parallels between biological viruses and viral memes, nothing even vaguely comparable to our body's complex natural immune system has yet evolved within the human mind – and certainly nothing reminiscent of those wonderful virus-eating microphage cells. Conscious work with anti-meme systems can break the power of memes and memeplexes to define our experience of reality, and thus to limit and control us, but the disempowered mind-viruses left in the wake of such work have no place to go, and so they remain, disabled and mostly impotent, in our minds.

The common Chicken Pox virus may present the best biological example of this dynamic. In childhood, the Varicella-Zoster virus causes the distinctive rash and itchy red spots most of us remember scratching our way through sometime during our first decade of life. Upon recovery, we assume the infection is forever behind us. But, even though battling the illness has trained our immune systems toward vigilance against the resurgence of symptoms, the virus itself never actually leaves our bodies. The virus and our immune response to it have balanced out, and, under ideal circumstances, though we will

always carry the virus, we can count on never again suffering its ill effect. Our bodies cannot permanently kill the virus, which was never alive to begin with, but the continuing presence of Varicella-Zoster-specific antibodies in our systems can prevent it from ever again proliferating to a level capable of producing symptoms.

Unless, of course, some major stress or an autoimmune disorder enters our lives to tip the scales of that balance in the direction of viral proliferation. If we are children when this unfortunate shift occurs, a second bout of Chicken Pox is not only possible, it is actually quite common. As adults, the failure of our immune system to maintain its cold war against the Varicella-Zoster virus allows it to resurface as painful Shingles that can persist for weeks, months, or even years.

Memes, once disempowered by conscious work with an anti-meme system, go similarly dormant, losing their power to be mistaken as facts in the construction of our internal reality simulations, but they never relinquish their instructions to keep trying. The result is a mental detente in which we remain free of the symptoms of possession by specific disempowered memes, and retain access to the psychic energy freed when their power over our minds was broken, only so long as we maintain constant vigilance against their resurgence. It often happens that Stage Two "seekers," having maintained years of freedom from the power of foundational childhood memes, fall right back under their spell when hit by some major life stressor (the death of a loved one, divorce, job loss, etc.), regressing under their influence all the way back to wholly unconscious, but, at least temporarily comforting, Stage One sleep.

Such Varicella-Zoster-like memetic resurgences are tragically common among Stage One and Two sleepers struggling to escape the controlling influence of memes without the benefit of an anti-meme system. With the advent of true Stage Three awakening this dynamic is permanently changed, and the temptation to fall back into the waiting arms of comforting

meme-dreams is transformed into a dilemma of legendary proportions, as exemplified by Christ's temptation in the desert or Buddha's encounter with the demon king Mara beneath the Bodhi tree. But as Stage One and Stage Two sleepers, our predicament plays out on an ordinary, human scale, as we struggle to "see through" and break the reality-shaping power of memes to control our minds, while never relaxing into self-deceptive certainty that the job is done.

Chapter 6

THE KEY QUESTIONS TECHNIQUE

The ten "keys" to be explored in Part II of this book are a set of questions which, when entertained in a specific and somewhat counterintuitive manner I'll be describing shortly, have the power to disrupt the hypnotic control of their target memeplexes in a way closely akin to the strategy used by antiviral drugs to stop the spread of viruses within our bodies. But, just as is the case with physical medications, the method of administering these Key Questions is every bit as important as their "chemistry." The most potentially beneficial medicine, taken against recommended instructions (imagine swallowing a suppository, rubbing cough syrup on your chest, or attempting to inject a large pill) can have all sorts of unintended, even disastrous consequences, ranging from the medication simply not working, to overdose, illness or death. So, too, plowing forward into Part II without first gaining a clear understanding of the Key Questions Technique is almost certain to disable the curative effect of the explorations ahead, and may even have strong negative consequences, such as allowing the memes already controlling your perception to gain a deeper foothold on your mind, or the opening of your brain to fresh memetic infection.

So, slow down! Pay attention! The achievement of genuine awakening depends, not only on asking ourselves the right questions, but on doing so in exactly the right way.

CREATING REALITY

Memes enter our minds through imitation of the words and behaviors of already-meme-infected human beings in our environment, or of their representative cultural artifacts, such as books, magazine articles, songs, TV shows, movies, classroom education, etc. That explains how memes get in. But, once inside our brains, how do they manage to so effectively "hijack" our perception of reality, and to maintain such a powerful, long term, and largely invisible grip (invisible to us, that is, though friends and family can often quite easily diagnose our primary mental infections) on our identity and behavior?

Let's look again at my office chair from Chapter Two. We can agree that the "chair meme," under close examination, turns out to be a memeplex that can be broken down into the smaller, individual memes of "sticks" plus "wood" plus "cloth" plus "sit" plus "comfort" plus "welcome," etc. But what pulled all those puzzle-piece memes together into a unified, functioning chair in the first place?

The answer is *our brains*, and not any power belonging to memes themselves. Memes have no power of their own to create our experience of reality. What they do, instead, is present themselves, surreptitiously, to our brains as "facts" with equal standing alongside measurements of light entering our eyes, of sounds received by our ears, of scents caressing our nostrils, flavors dancing on our tongues, and sensations prickling the multitude of nerve endings embedded within our skin. Our brains then generate delusional reality simulations built from facts and falsehoods indistinguishably co-mingled, in which memes lie invisibly coiled around every object, hidden within every idea and relationship, and costumed in the face and form of all our most apparently personal emotions, desires and beliefs.

While the New Age commonism "We create our own reality" can be dangerously misleading when mistakenly applied to the

objective, external world (imagine the hubris of believing oneself to be personally responsible for the formation of distant galaxies or the maintenance of fundamental cosmic, chemical or biological processes), it is literally true regarding our individual virtual reality simulations. We are real physical beings inhabiting a real physical world in a real physical Cosmos – that is, we are not creating any of these tangible external features. But our subjective experience of all these things – from viewing distant galaxies through the most powerful earth-based telescopes, which, however great their magnification, can only extend the reach of our physical eyes, to walking along a glistening white sand beach or hiking a fragrant forest trail, to our most intimate impressions of our own bodies reflected in a mirror, the sight of our sleeping children's faces, or the sensation of our spouse's body pressed tightly against our own in the night – takes place wholly inside our own heads. In this sense, "creating reality" is a core function of all brains, human and animal alike. Our ability to experience, understand and interact with our environment and each other requires our brains, first, to generate and continually update an internal psychic copy of as much of the outside world as we are able to "read" with our senses in the moment.

And that's where memes "get" us.

Our brains, having evolved over the course of millennia in service to our genes, have yet to develop any natural system for distinguishing memes from bona fide sensory input, comparable to our body's complex and effective immune response to the presence of bacterial or viral invaders. Under normal conditions, we are naively blind to the counterfeit nature of the psychic insinuations memes feed our brains, and have little choice but to obligingly stir them, right along with legitimate data, into the mix of our personal "reality soup."

But it is of critical importance to recognize that, just as biological viruses inject healthy cells with viral DNA, which then tricks the cell's natural replicating machinery into dropping

its proper function in favor of making copies of the virus, so memes accomplish their conquest of our personal realities by really doing nothing more than "injecting" our brains with comparably lifeless informational "coding." When that coding is brought to life in the creation of our delusional, 3-D dream-worlds, it is always and only our brains, and never memes, that are doing all the work.

Which, in turn, is where we can "get" memes, and begin the work of reclaiming our evolutionary birthright.

There is nothing wrong with our brains. In creating our personal meme-dreams, mixed up and illusory as they are, our brains are not malfunctioning. They are working efficiently as designed, doing a very good job of processing bad information, just as a desktop PC, infected with a computer virus, is not malfunctioning when it erases its own hard drive and sends copies of its attacker to every email recipient listed in the stored address book, or a cell is not demonstrating incompetence when it shifts from fulfilling the instructions of its own DNA to executing the more chemically compelling commands of a viral assailant. Both are dutifully, and quite capably, carrying out malicious programming – as are we, when we create and inhabit meme-infected dream-worlds.

We have seen that the most effective method for defeating viral infection in our bodies is not to attempt to kill viruses directly, but rather, to interfere, chemically, with their ability to reproduce. In an almost exact analogy, the path to freedom from memetic possession lies, not in attacking any meme or memeplex directly, but rather, in working with an anti-meme system to gradually and permanently alter the "normal conditions" of our minds, converting them into environments that inhibit, rather than promote, the procreative cycles of memes in general.

WITHOUT A DOUBT

What lends all of the facts, both real and ersatz, from which we weave our personal reality simulations their "factual" status – the "psychic glue" that allows authentic sensory signals from our environment and the deceptive siren songs of memes to bind, blend and blossom in our minds into the 3-Dimensional illusion we mistake for objective reality – is our assignment to those facts, individually and collectively, of an utterly subjective and unquestioning quality of *certainty*. One command the viral coding of all successful memes and memeplexes have in common is some variety of instruction signaling us to *believe*, to accept the full coding packet that follows the command to believe without the benefit of substantiating evidence, and often in the face of strong contradictory data coming to us from other sources. We never question the majority of the memes controlling our experience of reality, not because their "obvious truth" is in some way genuinely self-evident, but rather, because it simply never occurs to us to challenge their validity. This is no accident.

Some biological viruses, once they have come into contact with a healthy cell, emit a chemical signal that tells the cell to engulf and absorb the invader, tricking the cell into swallowing the full strand of viral DNA deep into its own interior. Effective memes operate much the same way. One natural function of our brains, in the creation of our virtual reality simulations, is the filtering of incoming data at incredible rates of speed. As external information enters through our physical senses, our brains must decide in scant milliseconds, making hundreds of such decisions every single second, all day every day, whether to weave each particular informational "thread" into the fabric of our personal experience of reality, to disregard it altogether, or to leave it out of the mix for the time being, but store it away in memory for future consideration. When a meme's coding begins with a signal commanding unquestioning belief – a command

mimicking the signature of legitimately gathered sensory data – our brains are tricked into instantaneously "swallowing" the viral meme in its entirety, and tagging it for inclusion in the construction of our personal realities without further review.

But, while genuine and mimicked certainty commands have similar effects on our perception when applied to the high-speed information processing taking place every second within our brains, the two signals are by no means identical. The seductive whisper of memes and the thunderous shout of genuine sensory data stand worlds apart in their intensity, and therefore, in the extent to which we can learn to identify and resist their influence, as well.

Parasitic memes are relative newcomers to the evolutionary scene, being, of necessity, no more ancient than the development of the human brains that provide their host environment, while our big human brains are physical heirs to the full 3.5 to 4.5 billion years of biological evolution that preceded the birth of our species. Those billions of years of gradual genetic evolution leading up to the emergence of *Homo sapiens* have quite effectively "hardwired" all brains on our planet, human brains included, to recognize genuine sensory data as real, whereas our species' unique and, by comparison, extremely brief and recent affair with memes is far too short lived to have yet created any true biological mandate compelling us to "swallow" malicious memetic programming.

Simply put, reality does not go away when you stop believing in it. Memes do. Reality is testable. Under close examination, memes crumble.

FROM CRISIS, OPPORTUNITY

Imagine driving down a winding country road at night, traveling 90 miles an hour. Yours is the only car on the road, but your excessive speed, the continually changing landscape as you

swerve left, then right, then left again, and your limited view of the road directly ahead, illumined only by your headlights, requires total mental focus if you hope to stay out of the ditch. Your eyes, trained steadily on the road, are taking in and sorting hundreds of bits of information every second – the changing pavement, trees, horizon, sky, moon, stars, potential shadows of animals darting out into your path. The radio is blaring, but, behind the music, your ears are also carefully measuring the subliminal sounds of the purring engine, of wind whistling past windows, weighing the absence of car horns in anticipation of the sudden appearance of other drivers. The wheel is solid in your hands, your foot heavy on the accelerator.

Now imagine suddenly losing your ability to believe your own perceptions, to trust, without question, that the road is, in fact, a solid road beneath you, as opposed to, say, a flowing river or an empty mirage, that your hands on the wheel are, indeed, your own hands, and not someone else's (or tentacles, or the glowing hands of an angel), and that it truly is the trees that are standing still as you whiz past them, rather than you who is stationary, as the woods hurtle by…

The most likely fate of anyone undergoing such a profound and poorly-timed disillusionment would be death in the ditch. Fortunately for us, the possessor of a healthy, non-inebriated human brain is never likely to experience such an unbidden psychic meltdown. Our "hardwired" prejudice in favor of information gathered by way of sight, sound, smell, taste and touch would never allow it (and if you find yourself disagreeing with this assertion, please check your definitions of "healthy" and "non-inebriated").

But every one of us has experienced the memetic equivalent of the scene above:

- After many years of marriage to someone you have loved and built a life with, you discover that your spouse has been repeatedly unfaithful the whole time you've been together.

- A lifelong patriot, you discover that your own government secretly participates in exactly the same corrupt and immoral activities as the "enemies" it decries.

- The company you've built your career with gets caught illegally dumping toxic waste into a lake that provides drinking water for thousands, distributing what it knows to be dangerously defective products to unwary third world markets, and/or attempting to shred 20 year old documentation of the devastating health hazards to workers of the manufacturing process still in use today.

- A loved one doesn't smoke, eats right, exercises daily, and still dies from cancer in his fifties.

- Your most respected religious leaders are revealed to molest children, frequent prostitutes, and apply the considerable power of their spiritual authority toward "grooming" followers for exploitation.

- A trusted parent, stepparent, teacher, boss, doctor or psychiatrist makes sexual advances toward you.

- After being dragged home by police in the middle of the night, your "squeaky clean" teenager, of whom you have boasted proudly to friends, and who you have trusted to come and go pretty much as he pleases because of his consistently responsible behavior, confesses to a secret life of drugs, sex and petty crime.

- The well-intentioned "white lies" you long ago pardoned your parents for telling you as a child – *Santa Clause, the Easter Bunny, the Tooth Fairy* – turn out to have adult correlates you find harder to forgive – *the Perfect Marriage, the American Dream, the Only Right Way to Live…*

We can easily imagine a hundred other examples. To the extent that our personal reality simulations are woven from a greater percentage of memes than of present-moment perceptions – a percentage which, in the lives of Stage One and Two sleepers, usually approaches 100% – the introduction of even small amounts of uncertainty, let alone the massive helpings above, can literally shatter our worlds. We are left reeling, disoriented, lost in terrain that looks the same to our eyes, but which we do not recognize. All familiar meaning (memes) has been ripped away.

We most often greet such devastating shocks to our bedrock beliefs, understandably, as crises. But they also present some of our best opportunities for awakening by alerting us, experientially, to the deep unreality of our dreamed lives and the artificiality of the "meanings" we assign to the words and actions of others (and ourselves, too). In such situations, the "facts" we accepted as true, real and trustworthy in the construction of our personal reality simulations were never actually any of those things. We just believed they were. The collapse of our world comes, not as a consequence of any real external change, but of new data blasting away memes that previously held our personal pseudo-reality together.

Such disillusionments, successfully lived through, can provide us with tangible, firsthand proof that having the memetic foundations, good or bad, torn out from under our dream worlds changes nothing that is real. In the aftermath of personal crises, the way we live our lives may be altered dramatically – relationships end, we make new choices based on new information, we might adjust our residence or profession – but the earth keeps turning, spring still follows winter, hydrogen and oxygen continue to combine into water and galaxies go on drifting inexorably apart. One hundred percent of the upheaval within, and resettling of, our lives occurs inside our minds, and nowhere else. When we internalize this negative lesson in moments of crisis, it becomes easier to remember in

moments of contentment and apparent security that our "happy dreams" are built on no more solid a foundation. We can begin to understand that good and bad dreams alike spring from the same common root of illusion, and that we are far better served by working to awaken from both than by wasting our lives bouncing back and forth between them in deluded slumber.

All earthly brains, from the simple ganglia of earthworms to the hundred-billion-neuroned super computers in the heads of human beings, come "hardwired" by our shared billions of years of biological evolution to recognize and automatically filter species-appropriate, externally-gathered sensory data into our "personal reality mixes" with reasonable accuracy. However hard we might try to "unbelieve" in our external environment, we stand in little danger of finding ourselves floating in nothingness or otherwise tragically disengaged from the real physical world, or our experience of ourselves as physical beings within it, by simply thinking differently – otherwise, the wide popularization of quantum physics would have long ago utterly transformed our sensory experience of the world's solidity, size and stillness. The material nature of our environment, our senses, and our brains, all of which have a real, physical existence beyond their faulty representations in our minds, is such that our most penetrating questioning of external reality will have little or no effect on what is real "out there." We will surely come to understand our bodies, the earth, the stars or the greater physical Cosmos better as a product of systematic questioning (which is a pretty good definition of the Scientific Method – *systematic questioning*). But for the most part, objective reality, closely scrutinized, is going to sit there, just as it is, and let us study it.

The same is not true of memes. Where certainty is not present, memes have no power. Our goal in applying the Key Questions Technique must always, therefore, be *to attain the relinquishment of certainty*, which – and this is a critical distinction – is by no means the same thing as simply doubting our beliefs.

NOT DOUBT, BUT WONDER

Belief and doubt are two sides of the same memetic coin. While most memes trick our brains into tagging them as facts to be woven into our personal reality simulations by leading with a signal commanding us to *believe*, others have very craftily evolved the ability to gain entry to even the wariest of minds by "dressing up" as their polar opposites, and gaining a foothold in our minds with fervent commands calling us to *disbelieve*. Rather than deceiving us into accepting their own factual nature, they present us with "opposite facts" we are ordered to reject, and we wind up accepting the real, undisguised meme by default.

One clear example of this dynamic can be found in the exceptionally meme-ridden field of UFOlogy (the study of Unidentified Flying Objects, or UFOs), where the vast majority of researchers, sighting report investigators, and especially authors publishing books and magazine articles detailing their research findings on the subject, can be divided into two polar-opposite, black and white camps – *True Believers* and *Debunkers*. The True Believers may disagree on whether UFOs originate in outer space, other dimensions of reality, inside the "hollow earth," or from spiritual planes of existence, etc., but they all resoundingly agree that there is, in fact, a mysterious UFO phenomenon to be researched, debated, and eventually, solved. UFO Debunkers, on the other hand, while they may disagree amongst themselves on which prosaic natural or manmade phenomena explain specific sightings, all begin their thinking processes from the same, often unconscious, base assumption that no real UFO phenomenon exists, and that all reports of strange lights in the sky, encounters with non-human entities, "alien abductions," etc. must, by definition, be honest misidentifications of airplanes, satellites, clouds, etc., hoaxes, or a result of psychological processes warping the perceptions of the witness. For UFO Debunkers, there is no UFO phenomenon,

per se. There is only a human phenomenon of naivety and wish fulfillment being projected onto the skies.

From the standpoint of memes, which side of the "UFO Question" any one individual falls on, True Believer or Debunker, is irrelevant. Both types are successfully infected with the "UFO meme," and contribute a great deal of psychic energy to its maintenance and proliferation. Belief and doubt, as those terms are generally understood, serve identical functions. As long as people keep talking about UFOs, the meme thrives. Both True Believers and Debunkers are necessary for there to be a sufficiently lively debate on the issue to attract new minds to the discussion, and, thus, into "infection range," and the larger UFO memeplex uses both strategies simultaneously to ensure its survival.

Another good example might be the contemporary religion of Satanism, which, on one hand, can be seen to appeal most strongly to individuals disaffected by a traditional Christian upbringing, but which, on the other hand, cannot exist in any serious way independent of the Mother Church it rebels against. As a central figure in Christian mythology, the fallen angel Satan has no purpose without the Christian God/Christ he so vehemently opposes, and who, alternately, has no clear adversary, or easy explanation of evil, without Satan. It's irrelevant to the grand Christian memeplex whether individuals embrace God or Satan – all followers of either deity invest enormous psychic resources in maintaining and spreading the core Good VS Evil mythology that unites them. The greater memeplex, wholly unified on a larger scale, is strengthened by the apparent lower-level conflict.

We cannot break the power of memetic possession by simply doubting our beliefs. If we use the Key Questions in Part II of this book to cast shadows of doubt over the beliefs we once held, and then stop there, we merely trade one self-satisfying meme for another, and remain enslaved and asleep. By keeping Key Questions open in our minds and hearts, we can bypass certainty

in either direction and move beyond both belief and doubt into a space of extraordinary psychic and energetic freedom – the space of satori, enlightenment, salvation, awakening, in which neither belief nor doubt hold any power, in which their unity is seen through and transcended in favor of knowing what is, just as it is, directly, free of labels, opinions, judgments and attachments of all kinds.

In the absence of certainty, memes have no power. But the absence of certainty is not doubt, as clever memes would have us believe, but, rather, *wonder*.

True Believers and Debunkers stand equally secure in their comforting "know-it-all" illusion that reality is easily comprehensible, and that they, personally, inhabit its center, sure truth clutched tightly to their skins. Their worlds remain small and manageable, confined as they are within the sharp boundaries of limitation set by memes.

Wonder, on the other hand, is the limitless bursting out of our skins that we feel staring wide-eyed up into a starry winter night sky. Wonder is standing beside the ocean for the first time, our egos flattened to pinpoints before its enormity and power. Wonder is the terrifying inevitability of childbirth, the crushing humility of witnessing our struggling newborn's first breath, our ears pierced by that first primal cry, the drumbeat pulse in our throats as we become, in that moment, true ancestors, the blood of millions of years of human evolution rushing toward us like a river, splashing through us to our progeny, flowing on through those blue infant veins into an unwritten future.

Wonder is seldom comforting; more often, it is shattering to our tiny, self-absorbed egos. But only wonder can carry us permanently beyond the stagnant dreams of meme-induced sleep. Wonder is our birthright as human beings, the natural state our minds occupy when not corralled within memetic boxes of limitation and lack, every meme-free human brain's innate response to reality as it is.

THE KEY QUESTIONS TECHNIQUE

The Key Questions that follow open doorways to wonder. As you entertain them, neither believe nor doubt. Only question. Witness what occurs within your mind as you refuse to accept any one answer, and yet, simultaneously, also to stop questioning. Watch the tension build as your memes rebel, as the parasitic nature of your habitual worldview first becomes obvious, then loses its footing, then pulls every trick in the book trying to distract you into turning off the alarm, rolling over, and returning to sleep.

Keep questioning. Grant memes no quarter. Greet every shining temptation and panicked command to close down with greater opening. Question for the sheer joy of questioning. Let every meme-proffered answer drive you further from certainty, toward ever-deepening levels of inquiry. Keep questioning until your mind is transformed (*metanoia*), the power of memes is broken, your personal meme-dream collapses, and you burst through to freedom, awakening and wonder.

Wonder, in this sense, is not a verb. It is not something anyone can do. Wonder is a state of mind we enter naturally as our persistent open questioning gradually, and permanently, alters the normal conditions of our minds, converting them into environments that inhibit, rather than promote, the procreative cycles of memes.

In the absence of certainty, memes have no "glue" with which to maintain their parasitic control of our minds and lives.

Come "unglued," and wonder rushes in.

COMPOUND CONSCIOUSNESS

One crucial difference executive coaches and motivational speakers identify between a person who maintains the appearance of worldly wealth by squandering a high salary on

"conspicuous consumption" and someone who succeeds in building a great and lasting fortune, however modest his or her income, lies in their disparate levels of understanding concerning the importance of *personal reinvestment*. If, every month, the fellow with a good salary spends every dime he earns on fast cars, Rolexes and inflated credit card interest, when the end of the month comes, he will be no further from complete financial failure than a counterpart earning minimum wage and barely scraping by – a "disaster distance" of exactly one paycheck. The true wealth builder, on the other hand, understands that escape from the limitations of a "disaster distance" lifestyle requires him to reinvest a high percentage of his earnings in the development of his personal earning potential – education, training, the acquisition of tools and skills, networking with potential business partners, etc. – thereby transforming every paycheck into a stepping stone on the path to greater future earnings, which will, themselves, be reinvested, feeding new cycles of growth.

Successful work with the Key Questions Technique follows a similar rule. As you succeed in disempowering small memes and memeplexes, rather than squandering the psychic energy released by their demise, work instead to redirect such energies back into the questioning process itself. This protects freed energy from the machinations of competing memes by making it unavailable for consumption because it has been reinvested into new, useful activity – dislodging larger memes. Continual, conscious reinvestment of reclaimed energy into an ever-deepening questioning process can set off an exponential "Key Questions feedback loop" with the power to dramatically accelerate your journey toward total psychic freedom. By diligently reinvesting freed energy into activities designed to liberate even greater energetic reserves, an explosive domino effect is set in motion that can very quickly overwhelm general memetic controls, supercharge your brain, and trigger personal enlightenment to full Stage Three awakening.

KEY QUESTION COMMUNITIES

The Key Questions Technique is far easier to describe than it is to practice. The many thousands of years that memes have controlled human experience may pale when compared to the billions of years of pre-meme biological evolution on earth, but our best informed efforts to throw off our personal case of meme possession are mere moments, weeks, months, or at the very most, years or decades in the making, and so inertia is heavily weighted in favor of memes, and the persistence of the long established habits of human consciousness that have allowed memes to exploit and control us.

We like closure, and being certain we know "what's what." We find playing the lead role in reality's grand drama flattering. We hesitate to surrender a lifetime's sweat-equity in being "right" and "good" and "kind" in a world clearly demarcated into easy right/wrong, good/bad and kind/cruel dichotomies. Perhaps most of all, we have been trained from birth by our meme-controlled social, cultural and religious programming to name the burning yaw unanswered questions open up within our hearts and minds "fear," "anxiety," "trepidation" and "sin," and to extinguish such fires as quickly as possible by closing up, shutting down, compliantly towing the line of our childhood training like good boys and girls. Even when we successfully break away from the specific memes of our youth, we maintain the deeper habit of finding anxiety unbearable, of desiring always to rest in a steady state of surety, whatever our accepted beliefs of the moment. Left to our own devices, the chances that we will eventually desert our Key Questions practice for the warm embrace of comforting meme-dreams is very high.

Key Question Communities – groups of two, four, ten, a hundred individuals working together to mutually support each member's personal struggle to throw off meme-sleep and awaken to wonder – can increase our individual chances of success many-fold. Friends along the path can help keep us

honest, shaking us when we fall back into our personal meme-dream, reminding us to struggle, cheering us on, and we can do the same for them. Key Questions are easier to keep open in groups, where exciting conversations can be pursued as spiritual practice, brainstorming freely together, bolstered by a common agreement to eschew categories of right/wrong, good idea/bad idea, etc., as well as to converse only for the sake of conversing, and never to convince, cajole or conclude. Key Question Communities can offer seekers an oasis of safety, comfort and belonging without exacting the usual meme-imposed toll of psychic enslavement, offering members an alternative value-environment in which the unconscious pressure to conform that permeates the collective meme-dream can be consciously offset by shared acceptance of awakening, and the valiant personal struggle to attain it, as the highest measure of individual worth.

By establishing your own local Key Question Community group, you can help make this important resource available to all who enter the path behind you. Whether you join an existing community or start your own, remember in all your personal and group work with Key Questions to follow these basic "ground rules":

- Aggressively question what you currently believe to be true, and question all possible alternatives with equal fervor. Accept no one answer as "definitive," "certain" or "true."

- Witness your mind's resistance, its desperate struggle to restore closure, certainty, sleep. Refuse to name the tension generated by such memetic death-throes "fear," "anxiety," "sin," etc. Keep questioning.

- Hold questions open beyond your apparent psychic breaking point. Defy closure. Live the question.

- Neither believe nor doubt. Instead, break through to wonder.

- Reinvest reclaimed psychic energy into the questioning process itself. Ride an exponential Key Questions feedback wave all the way to enlightenment!

Part II: Keys

Try to love the questions themselves, like locked rooms and like books written in a foreign language. Do not now look for the answers. They cannot now be given to you because you could not live them. It is a question of experiencing everything. At present you need to live the question.

– Rainer Maria Rilke, *Letters to a Young Poet*

Chapter 7

Key Question #1
ARE ALL THE GREAT SPIRITUAL TEACHERS OF HISTORY LIARS?

In his classic work of Christian apologetics, *Mere Christianity*, C. S. Lewis poses, in relation to the question of the divinity of Jesus, a famous "trilemma" - like a dilemma, only with three opposing poles instead of two. Was Jesus Christ a liar, a lunatic, or was he, in fact, Lord and God, as the Christian religion claims? Lewis contends that anyone seriously aspiring to label themselves "Christian" is obliged to tackle this question head-on, and to take a stand on one of the three propositions. His own stand is that the evidence of Scripture, and the historical impact of the life and teachings of Jesus on human society, argue powerfully in favor of Jesus being Lord and God, and not dishonest or deranged. But we don't have to agree or disagree with his personal assessment in order to benefit from the power of this challenging question. If we broaden Lewis's "trilemma" beyond the obvious memetic confines of any specific religion or dogma to include all the founders of world religions, as well as the many historically-documented saints, saviors, avatars, Buddhas, bodhisattvas, enlightened ones, etc. who claim to have broken through to Stage Three consciousness following the founders' teachings, the question may be very usefully rephrased thus:

Are all the great spiritual teachers of history liars, lunatics, or liaisons to an objectively real and attainable awakened state of human consciousness?

In addition to the well-known founders of the major Eastern and Western religions – Abraham, Moses, Jesus, Mohamed, Buddha, Lao-Tzu, the unnamed authors of the Hindu Vedas, etc. – there are, using a very conservative estimate, literally hundreds of thousands, perhaps even millions, of individuals throughout history, right up to the present moment, who are considered to have achieved, through the disciplined application of the founders' teachings, a firsthand experience of awakened consciousness. The Catholic Church has canonized more than 10,000 saints since the practice of publicly acknowledging exceptional spiritual achievement was established in that Tradition. Hinduism and Buddhism, both of which are more ancient than Christianity, recognize many times that number of enlightened arhats, avatars, yogis, swamis, Brahmin, Buddhas, Bodhisattvas, roshis, Zen masters, etc. What sense are we to make of this historical hoard of claimants to the achievement of extraordinary states of human functioning?

Could they all be liars, conmen, hucksters, carpetbaggers? Is all religion/spirituality a fantastic shell-game, continued generation after generation by the least scrupulous of the once-duped, in pursuit of personal or institutional worldly wealth and power? If you answer "Yes!" to this proposition – *they're all liars!* – what larger worldview is supported by this pillar of belief? Is there a "grand conspiracy" out there, global in scope and millennia in the making, of shady individuals willfully inventing false stories about gods, mystic visions, experiences of awakening, etc. in order to gain social advantage over the naïve shills and rubes around them?

Or maybe they're just nuts. Maybe all professed glimpses into a reality larger than the common daily grind are more akin to psychotic episodes – break*downs* rather than break*throughs*.

Could the visions of Christian mystics, the satori of Buddhist monks, the kundalini experiences of Hindu Yogis, etc. be manifestations of mental illness, rather than any kind of heightened awareness? Answering "Yes!" to this proposition – *they're all lunatics!* – supports a worldview in which "sanity" is defined by adherence to the mental norm and the social status quo, and the containment of individuals within the familiar boundaries of standard consensus reality. Enlightenment experiences may seem 100% subjectively real to those undergoing them, and so individuals sharing the stories and the insights arising from them may in no way be seeking to intentionally deceive, but can we really be expected to abandon common sense and join them in their delusions?

What if *enlightenment is real?* What if the vision of a greater reality, and of Humanity's expanded role and potential within it, as described by Jesus, Buddha, Mohamed, et. al., is more than a parlor trick, a delusion, or even a clever psychological metaphor. What if there really are objectively-verifiable states of consciousness and modes of brain functioning that are significantly more refined and free of psychic limitation than the ones we access in our day to day lives? What happens if we accept the testimony of History's enlightened ones as proof that such states really exist?

We must then ask how such enlightened individuals differ from the rest of us, and whether that difference is a matter of substance or struggle. Were historical spiritual giants like Jesus, Buddha, Mohamed or Lao-Tzu "outside agitators?" Were they gods, demons, spirits, celestial or extraterrestrial beings whose teachings may inspire us, but whose genius we are not biologically equipped to emulate? If they come from "above," will we always be lesser beings who can never realistically hope to match or surpass their accomplishments? Or were they ordinary human beings like ourselves who attained heights of functioning at least theoretically available to everyone, and who left instructions by which future generations might personally

follow in their footsteps to the achievement of similar results? Is real enlightenment, stripped of the specific memetic embellishments of any one doctrine or dogma, a top-down hierarchically-granted gift, like the Christian theological notion of "undeserved grace?" Or is it an evolutionary bottoms-up affair, potentially available to anyone willing to work their way up the consciousness ladder, wrung by wrung to reach it?

If we say *"Yes!"* to this proposition – *they're liaisons to awakening!* – we have already rejected hierarchy in favor of evolution, since in the top-down scenario, the difference between top and bottom are too great for either to ever really "become" the other. Any potential hierarchical awakening, in the sense so far discussed, would be comparable to an ant awakening to become a cat or a cow. It won't work! They're just too different! In the evolutionary worldview, our awakened ant friend is destined, instead, to blossom into a "super-ant," spiraling upward and outward into ever-expanding and previously unimagined levels of "antness."

"Yes!" also implies an underlying worldview reminiscent of the one described in Part I of this book, a vision of a planet filled with sleeping people capable of accessing incredible untapped potential, if only they can find the energy and direction to actualize it. It implies that we are all, at any moment, capable of reaching the highest states of consciousness ever attained by any human being, anywhere on earth, at any time in history, including those exemplified by our historical spiritual heroes.

If our answer to the "trilemma" of Key Question #1 is a resounding *liaisons to awakening!*, then we must not dodge the obvious follow-up question. If we accept that enlightenment is objectively real, that we are currently functioning in a lesser psychic state and therefore "sleeping our lives away," and that the path from slumber to awakening is both known and presently available to us, then why are we doing ANYTHING with our lives other than following the path to awakening? Aware of the illness and in possession of the cure, why do we

remain invested in goals and activities we know to be unreal, and even injurious?

KEY QUESTION EXERCISE #1:
Changing Glasses

Rather than settling for any one perspective above, try intentionally believing each of the three propositions in turn. Hold them one at a time between your mind and the world as you might alternate pairs of glasses before your eyes. See the world through them. Stay with each proposition until it makes perfect sense, however long it takes, or how difficult the viewpoint is, at first, to adopt. When the "fact" that all claimants to enlightenment, in every religious/spiritual tradition, in all times and places are nothing but a pack of liars becomes obvious and undeniable, move on to lunatics. Work up some real compassion for those poor, crazy saps, spewing nonsense and finding themselves worshipped or crucified by crowds only slightly less mentally-disturbed than themselves. Let that go to invest real hope in the teachings of History's liaisons to awakening. See the grace and beauty of the path ahead. Let your heart flood with gratitude for the precious opportunity to attain awakening and freedom the enlightened ones have made available. Then return to liars, and go around again. Witness how easy it becomes, with even minimal practice, to shift between equally-convincing, contradictory interpretations of reality. Is there a perspective from which all of the propositions might be simultaneously true, or in which none of the three have any relevance? Try on those spectacles as well, then set them aside. Return to liars. Keep practicing.

In Key Question Community groups, consider the founders and their legacies – the universal sangha of the enlightened, the communion of saints, the heralded awakened ones in every tradition and time. Brainstorm as many positions one might take toward the fact of their existence and the veracity of their claims as

the group can muster. Write them all down. Have each member choose a position to defend, then debate the larger question vigorously as a group. Once an hour, everyone should change propositions, arguing each new perspective with equal vehemence.

Chapter 8

Key Question #2
WHAT WOULD JESUS DO?

The fad has mostly come and gone, but for a while, in 1990s America, every gas station, department store and quarter vending machine operator offered some kind of impulse item for sale (bracelets, rings, pendants, key chains, pens, erasers, bumper stickers, etc.) emblazoned with the now-famous acronym WWJD – *What Would Jesus Do?* Since the fad was marketed primarily toward middle class teens and pre-teens, the expected response to all honestly-queried WWJD?s, in every possible even slightly morally-ambiguous situation, was some version of *"Follow the rules like a good boy or girl…*" This eschewed any serious consideration of just whose definition of "Christ-likeness" one's response was being compared to, and therefore whose theology one was assenting to by participating in the fad in the first place. It also marked WWJD, by virtue of both its function of keeping young brains corralled within the confines of a restrictive religious thought pattern, and its mind-to-mind, word of mouth, viral method of dissemination, as an obvious, and, briefly, quite influential pop-culture meme.

But, when explored with intellectual honesty and moral integrity – as opposed to being used as a springboard to intellectual laziness and conformity to the opinions of self-appointed, self-serving ethical judges, which is how the fad played out – *What Would Jesus Do?* is actually a great anti-meme

question, especially for 21st Century Christians. In culturally modified form, it's just as great a question for the followers of any religious tradition. Faced with the looming crises outlined in Chapter I of this book – global warming, the depletion of oil reserves, terrorism and militaristic responses to it, war, famine, pestilence, death on a mass scale resulting from all of these causes and more, let alone the more human-scale needs of the modern world's literal billions of poor, hungry and sick – just exactly what would Jesus do? How would Buddha, Mohamed, Moses, Lao-Tzu, Paramahansa Yogananda, Mother Theresa or Gandhi respond? Are the actions of contemporary leaders of the religions founded or followed by the enlightened ones of the past in line with the teachings on which those traditions are based? What about our own words and actions, especially if we identify ourselves as Christians, Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus, Jews, etc.?

The unflinching integrity Jesus lived from and died for, his highest values, as detailed in the New Testament of the Christian Bible, remains a commanding example of human potential that two thousand years of dogmatic theological camouflage has not been able to erase. Though memes have done a great job of distracting many contemporary Christians into confusing the values Jesus exemplified with cruel fundamentalism, conservative politics and nationalistic "Americanism" (in the USA), the real character of Jesus' ultimate values, and his behavioral expectations for his followers based on those values, is preserved for all to read in the Gospel of Matthew, Chapter 25, Verses 35-40 (King James Version):

Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world:

For I was an hungered, and ye fed me: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in: Naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me.

Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungered, and fed thee? Or thirsty, and gave thee drink? When saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in? Or naked, and clothed thee? Or when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee?

And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.

The next few verses are a reversal of the text above, in which Jesus rebukes those who failed or refused to feed the hungry, attend to the sick, clothe the naked, visit the imprisoned, etc., relegating such moral misers, with utter disregard for any public or personal piety, sincere belief in Jesus as "personal savior," blind acceptance of the Bible (which didn't exist when he spoke the words) as the inerrant Word of God, or strict adherence to official Church dogma, to eternal punishment – an adamant condemnation the poetic Old English of the King James Version phrases, *"Depart from me, ye cursed, into ever-lasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels."*

To the credit of American Christians, the WWJD fad faded into obscurity when sincere and thoughtful followers of Jesus' teaching, from a variety of Christian denominations, recognized that the ultra-conservative, right wing ideologues positioning themselves behind the question as authorities on the will of Christ often reflected, in their words and actions, the opposite of the values expressed in Matthew 25. A symbolic counter-movement arose, attacking the hypocrisy of the Christian Right's ideological grip on the WWJD phenomenon with a panoply of leftist sloganeering – *Who Would Jesus Bomb?* and *Who Would Jesus Torture?* (anti-war), *What Would Jesus Drive?* (anti-SUV),

Who Would Jesus Refuse Health Care To? (anti-discrimination against the uninsured), etc.

What Jesus would do in response to hunger, disease, warfare, terrorism, and the many global crises that threaten to throw a blanket of suffering over the whole earth is really no mystery. His life was a model of active, moral response to the equivalent issues of his day. His criteria for assessing "right action" and for judging the responses of his followers to suffering and need are in Matthew for anyone to read.

The real anti-meme question WWJD places before us, and which has universal relevance to all human beings everywhere, regardless of religious affiliation (or lack thereof), is not what Jesus would do when faced with the challenges that beset our personal and collective lives, but rather, what would *we do* in response to need, suffering and moral ambiguity if we felt free to act with integrity from our highest values? The inescapable follow-up to which is, *What's stopping us?* What are we afraid will happen if we hold ourselves to the same standard of integrity as exemplified by our spiritual heroes? What beliefs or forces prevent us from acting in each moment from what we know to be the best in ourselves, from our highest ideals, our deepest compassion, our greatest generosity, kindness, self-sacrifice and strength? Why does even the suggestion of applying such a standard to ourselves ring so reflexively unrealistic in our ears? With the lives of Jesus, Buddha, Mohamed, Lao-Tzu, and all the enlightened ones of history as our examples, what convinces us that such full-throttle integrity is impossible in our own lives? By what compulsion or weakness are we driven, time and time again, to violate our personal, often hard-won understanding of "right action" in favor of easy, expedient or self-serving wrongs?

KEY QUESTION EXERCISE #2:
"What Would I Do If I Wasn't Afraid?"

For the next three days, every time you must make any kind of decision – however large or small, moral or practical, purely personal or involving others, whether you are on the job, at home, at school, out with friends, interacting with strangers, etc. – pause before choosing to sincerely consider the choice in light of the question, *"What would I do if I wasn't afraid?"* You don't necessarily have to take the action you decide on, but do make note of it. Keep a notebook or binder nearby while working with this exercise in which to privately record the choices you faced throughout each day, your responses to the WWID (*What Would I Do…?*) question, and what you actually did in the situation, especially if they differ. Review your list at the end of each day. What fears most frequently attempted to divert you from acting on your highest values? Which were the most successful, i.e., which most effectively convinced you to compromise? Was your "compromise quotient" on day three different than it was on day one? In what way? Why?

In Key Question Community groups, agree to practice the individual exercise a second time, with as little contact between group members during the three days as possible. Where contact is unavoidable, as when friends, family members or coworkers are part of the same Key Question Community group, agree not to discuss the exercise or share observations. At the end of the three days, meet together as a group. Exchange notebooks. Take turns critiquing each other's self-insight. What does the group see in each member's responses and final decisions that he or she may have overlooked? What self-knowledge are members protecting themselves from by turning a blind eye to insights obvious to the group? Discuss how the questioning and decision making process differed when each member did the exercise on their own, just for themselves, VS

the time period they knew would be reviewed by the group. Why did the differences occur, and what do they reveal?

Once the individual and group exercises have been completed, go ahead and leave your notebook or binder at home, but never stop asking the question, *"What would I do if I wasn't afraid?"* Keep WWID…? continually open in your mind until it becomes an ingrained habit of consciousness, an automatic extra step in all your day to day, moment to moment interactions with the world.

Chapter 9

Key Question #3
WHO DO YOU THINK YOU ARE?

What exactly are we referring to when we use the word *"I?"* The average person, in every country and language on earth, speaks or thinks their native version of "I" hundreds of times every day, probably more often. "I" has opinions about everything – it loves cookies and hates tofu, believes in God but not the Devil, selects a Classical, Jazz or Rock and Roll station on the radio, passing news, call-in programs and foreign language broadcasts with little more than a contemptuous jab of the tuner. Sufficiently challenged by the holders of contrary opinions, "I" takes a stand, tenaciously defending its position even to the point of waging war on "not-I" opponents it perceives as a threat to its way of life…

So, do our tastes and opinions define us? Think back to the opinionated stands you took when rebelling against your parents as a teen – are those still your beliefs? How about your first love, to whom you swore eternal ardor? Is your heart still burning? Are you eating and rejecting the same foods today that you did at age 10, 20, 30? Does the personality you label "I" today bear even a vague resemblance to the "I" you were 10, 20 or 30 years ago? As was discussed in Part I of this book, most or all of our tastes and opinions reflect memes that enter our brains through imitation, and which are therefore both constantly changing and in

no way unique or intrinsic to us as individuals. When we say "I," are we simply referring to our personal memeplex?

Maybe "I" means our physical bodies. While personalities surely change over time, our bodies at every age remain unique and ours alone, wholly separate and easily distinguishable from the bodies of others… right?

Some facts to ponder:

- When we notice an unpleasant odor in a restroom, we detect the smell because tiny particles expelled from the last tenant's body are still present, floating invisibly in the air around us. Our brains register the odor as the suspended particles enter our nostrils on their way to our lungs. Even as our noses crinkle in displeasure, we are physically absorbing cast off pieces of the "offender" into our own bodies.

- Every meal we eat contains exfoliated skin cells shed by the cook.

- The tap water we drink today is the same water our neighbor showered in yesterday, with only a single trip through the water treatment plant between uses.

- The earth's hydraulic cycle of rain-evaporation-rain has continuously recycled the same water for eons, with the result that water we consume today, and which accounts, on average, for 50-65% of our total physical composition, will have been ingested, excreted and otherwise made use of by literally billions of people, plants and animals at some time in earth's history. The same is true of the oxygen and carbon dioxide exchanged through respiration by all plants and animals, humans included.

- Since matter can neither be created nor destroyed, every carbon, oxygen, hydrogen and nitrogen atom our bodies are made from has physically participated in the composition of many other creatures and things during the 12 to 20 billion years

since the universe came into being. The atoms composing our bodies are not only *like* the atoms other people, plants, animals, planets, stars, galaxies etc. have been made from throughout all space and time, they literally are *the same* atoms being recycled and exchanged between arising and decaying forms.

- Quantum Physics proves that whenever two subatomic particles, such as protons, neutrons, electrons, quarks, or photons interact, they become, in strange, yet physically real and empirically measurable ways, permanently linked, exerting a continuous influence on one another regardless of the distance that may grow between them after their initial interaction. Since, before the Big Bang, all the matter and energy in the universe was compacted into a single, infinitely small space, the materials we and the plants and animals of earth, the earth itself, the stars, galaxies, and the universe in all its glory are made from have been intimately "entangled" since the beginning of time. Everything is connected to and effects everything else. On the quantum level, your neighbor literally *is* yourself, and what you do unto others you do, not only to yourself, but to everything everywhere.

Where our bodies end and our environment begins is an arbitrary distinction, based far more on our psychological desire to feel separate from others and unique in the world than on any evidence of real physical autonomy. All life on earth combines to form a single fragile, intimately interconnected membrane called the *biosphere* that envelopes the entire surface of the planet, extending from the ocean floor to approximately six miles overhead. Within that membrane's seething soup of chemical exchange, plants, animals and people are no more individually distinguishable than are the cells comprising our own bodies, which may appear singular and unique beneath the microscope, but which, in Nature, only fulfill their true function

corporately, in the exchange and transformation of substances in service to a larger whole.

So, if "I" can't be defined by our tastes and opinions, or by the only-apparently-distinct boundaries of our physical bodies, then what is it?

Is "I" our mind? What's that? If we exclude from our definition of "mind" all personal tastes and opinions, all the externally-acquired, memetic content of our brains, and the entire meme-driven process of comparison, prioritization and the assignment of meaning we mistake for real thought, what's left? Maybe the pure, pre-meme consciousness with which we were born, unsoiled as it was by any acquired knowledge of the world outside the womb? But even if such original awareness still exists somewhere deep within our adult brains, perhaps buried beneath our personal crushing load of acquired memes and memeplexes, can such a profoundly mystical self-concept really be what we mean when we say, *"I think...," "I feel…," "I want…"* or *"I believe…?"* in an ordinary, everyday context?

Our personal tastes, our bodies, our minds… When we say "I," do we mean all of these things? None of them? Does our definition of "I" change, maybe alternating between the various options, depending on our situation? Does any permanent and unchanging "I" actually exist within us?

Who do you think you are?

KEY QUESTION EXERCISE #3:
Role Play

Carry notepad and pen with you for seven consecutive days. During this time, record all of the roles you observe yourself playing in relation to other people, and also to animals, plants, and even non-living "entities" like corporations and governments. Assign a one word name to each role, such as *father, mother, sister, brother, son, daughter, husband, wife, lover, friend, enemy, boss,*

employee, bully, victim, teacher, student, caretaker, abuser, salesman, artist, citizen, etc. the first time you observe its appearance, and write that word at the top of a fresh page. Throughout the week, each time you are called on to play a particular role, note the length of time invested in the specific activity, conversation etc. on the appropriate page, always beginning a new page whenever a genuinely unique role is identified (**NOTE**: Don't subdivide roles too narrowly, i.e., while fathering a daughter, fathering a son and playing a fatherly role with a friend or someone else's child can require very different investments of time and energy, record them all under father). At the end of the week, add up the total times for each page to determine the five dominant roles currently shaping your definition of "I."

When the week is done, leave your notepad at home, but keep your five dominant roles at the forefront of your mind. For the seven days following the written discovery phase of this exercise, each time you are called on to play one of your primary roles, do the following:

Externally: Play the role. Do what you would normally do in the situation, just as if you were not aware that a formal role is involved. The fact that you are aware and paying conscious attention to what you're doing will make the interaction a bit awkward, especially when you first begin working with this exercise, but don't make any intentional efforts to change your behavior. Don't do what you think you "should do" in the situation, just because someone (you!) is watching. To the best of your ability, be "yourself" in a way that both you and the person, animal or "entity" you're interacting with will comfortably recognize.

Internally: Remove "I" from the interaction. Everyone's automatic habit when called to play a role – a habit learned very young, and usually hidden by adulthood well beneath the level of words or even conscious thought – is to immediately "attach our I" by becoming personally identified with the character we are being called to play, thinking/feeling/believing "*I am*

fathering," "I am mothering," "I am being a friend," "I am selling," etc. We step into the role like an actor taking the stage, inhabiting it on a deeply personal level, and often deriving a powerful sense of pride, control, intimacy, etc. from playing our prescribed part in life's drama. Instead of allowing identification to absorb your sense of self, at your first inkling of *"I am…,"* step back from personal investment and gently redirect your thoughts to the intentional, silent repetition of the impersonal one word label you assigned to the role in week one – *father… father… father…, mother… mother… mother…, salesman… salesman… salesman…*

In each real world situation you encounter, sincerely play the part of a father, a mother, a salesman, an employee, the boss, an attentive lover, a good friend, etc. as closely as you can manage to the way you would have had you not been aware that a designated role was involved, but without allowing *"I am…"* to sweep you into mental and emotional absorption. In a sense, instead of simply playing the comfortable roles you routinely move between in the course of a week, when working with the Role Play exercise, *play yourself playing those roles*. Repetition of the impersonal, one word label you assigned to each role can help you create and maintain some psychic distance.

At the end of each day, record any insights gained into yourself and others, as well as new information you discerned concerning the roles that occupy the lion's share of your time. Late on day seven, having gained considerable firsthand experience playing yourself playing various roles, spend some time journaling your response to these questions:

1. If I can play myself playing a role, is not "myself," then, also a role?

2. When "I" am playing "me," who or what is "I?"

Two notes of caution are in order concerning this exercise:

First, while simply reading the instructions above can easily trigger an intellectual *"aha!"* moment, don't let such a minor mental rush fool you into thinking that you have understood this chapter and are ready to move on. Invest the time. Research and play the roles. Observe yourself and record your findings. While *"aha!"* moments often produce memetic shocks and shifts within our minds that mimic insight, only personally verifying the truth underlying this exercise by living it out in real time can produce genuine *metanoia*, that complete transformation capable of immunizing our brains against memetic infection. Don't settle for less!

Secondly, please keep in mind that freaking out the people closest to you is in no way the goal or purpose of the Role Play exercise – though that's a likely outcome if you go around telling everybody you're "… just playing myself today…," or otherwise indicate a sense of obvious "de-personalization" in your interactions with them. The goal must be pure self-discovery, and never the alienation of others. If you are playing your role well, no one will notice that you are playing at all. If anyone but you becomes aware of what you're up to, stop. Rethink your approach to the exercise. Begin again another day or among a different group of people.

In Key Question Community groups, after everyone has had an opportunity to perform the Role Play exercise on an individual basis, gather in a private setting to discuss your results. As each member reports to the group, apply the following guidelines:

1. Individual reports should be delivered in Third Person, with references to roles labeled impersonally, i.e., *"Then father said…," "Then mother went…," "Then friend decided…"* etc., and with the reporter's "observing self" who witnessed and played out the various roles referred to as "He," "She" or "IT" as appropriate. The word "I" is strictly verboten.

2. As individual reports are delivered, the rest of the group should ask questions and make observations or constructive comments – but all commentary from the group must be delivered in the First Person of the reporter (not themselves), and must maintain the use of impersonal role labels, i.e., *"Did I notice that when father said…," "Was I disappointed when mother left…," "I may have been deceiving myself when friend decided…,"* etc. All references to the person offering the observation or comment are prohibited.

This can be a very difficult "game" to play at first, as both communicating without using the word "I" (the reporter) and saying "I" solely in reference to somebody other than oneself (the group) is guaranteed to drive everyone's brain headlong into a wall of psychic inertia created by a lifetime of putting ourselves at the center of every thought, event and story. Since everyone will take a turn reporting on their experiences from the individual phase of the exercise, every member of the group will get a chance to try on both perspectives, and to switch between them. Commit in advance as a group to take mistakes with good humor, and keep going. Make note of difficulties as well as successes along the way, mining each for the insights they have to reveal.

Once the group breaks through to a plateau of comfort inhabiting an "alternate-I universe," maintain the balance as long as you can. When everyone has had an opportunity to report, or if the energy begins to noticeably dwindle before the game's natural completion, agree together to return *en masse* to standard self-referencing pronoun communication and thought. Drop the game and return to ordinary social conversation. Each member should note his or her feelings as the "I-ward" shift occurs – Was it easy? Difficult? A relief? Frightening? How did the experience of "trading I's" impact your post-game ability to comfortably "be yourself?"

Chapter 10

Key Question #4
WHAT IS THE VALUE OF HUMAN LIFE?

According to the US Census Bureau's "POPClock" online global population projector, as I sit down to begin composing this chapter (2006), there are an estimated 6,497,704,892 human beings inhabiting the earth. That's almost six and a half thousand million people. In contrast, the population of the whole planet was under one hundred million in the year 1 CE (less than 2% of today's headcount). It took nearly two thousand years to reach the first billion mark, around 1850. By 1950, world population had more than doubled to about 2.5 billion. Human population, since the emergence of *Homo sapiens* on the planet, took 150,000 years to reach its first billion. The most recent billion accrued in just 12 years.

Current United Nations estimates, however, project that global population growth is now declining from previous exponential rates, and is expected to level off by the year 2050 at somewhere between nine and twelve billion. That’s good news, right?

Or is it? Let's take a closer look at that "leveling off" process. Why is it occurring? Why isn't population just escalating exponentially out of control, as futurists like Paul Ehrlich, author of *The Population Bomb*, once famously predicted?

Is human population being "thinned" by rampant war, famine and disease? The World Health Organization reports that just the opposite is true – in almost every country on earth, a significantly greater percentage of newborns are surviving the first five years of life, and more adults are reaching old age, than at any other time in history. Shouldn't that push our numbers up and up and up?

Not if fewer children are being born. According to the UN and other sources, recent and predicted future declines in human population growth are the result of steady, and in some cases quite dramatic, reductions in fertility. More and more, all around the globe, people are living longer and better, but we are having fewer children.

Why would that be?

Population scholars identify such declines in fertility, which have occurred on the smaller scale of individual nations and regions many times throughout history, as a likely result of *increased material prosperity*. Following a line of reasoning economists label a *utility maximization process*, couples tend to make decisions concerning family size based on the perceived cost of raising children. They weigh the contributions children can be expected to make to the family, such as increased love and companionship, the opportunity to grow through the experience of parenting, physical work and/or income in societies where child labor is the norm, the continuation of the family bloodline, etc., against the time, attention and household resources required to raise those children to adulthood. Fertility tends to decline as prosperity increases because economic development changes the traditional formula, allowing parents a wider range of options for pursuing self-fulfillment. Education becomes available and affordable, new professions and business opportunities arise, etc., while simultaneously increasing the cost of raising kids. Weighing all these factors, couples simply decide they want fewer children, and make eager use of family

planning programs that past generations in their own culture shunned.

In brief, rates of global population growth appear to be declining because *life is good*. Planet-wide, as a species, we can afford to produce fewer children, and so we are.

6,497,738,877. In the time it took me to compose the seven paragraphs above, global population jumped by 33,985 persons.

Another factor to consider here, and one the United Nations accounts for when calculating its population projections, is increased longevity. Advancements in medical science have dramatically extended individual lifespans over the last 100 years, a trend that is expected to continue. The modern drop in global fertility doesn't pose anything like the threat Ehrlich's "Population Bomb" once appeared to embody (i.e., we're in no danger of "imploding" or "erasing ourselves" by not having children) because we aren't dying off like we used to. As birthrates decrease, earth's human population is stabilizing, rather than shrinking, because we're sticking around longer to personally enjoy the prosperity that allowed us not to have kids in the first place. The triple-edged sword of affluence, effective birth control, and medical life-extension technology appears to have set our species on a swift and sure course toward fulfilling the 1980s American Yuppie dream of living forever without having to share our stuff with a bunch of bratty kids. On a global scale, *we are spending our children's inheritance*, as the famous Reagan Era bumper sticker once opined, defusing the "Population Bomb" by working to maintain our personal physical selves and our present affluent status quo for all eternity, while essentially eliminating future generations.

Is that a good plan? Is it a consciously chosen "plan" at all? Or is it simply happening?

6,498,105,638. About a day and a half passed between the completion of the paragraph above and my return to the composition of this chapter. In that time, world population grew

by 366,761 persons, for a total increase since launching this Key Question of 400,746 – almost half a million in less than 48 hours.

So long as we remain earthbound, and therefore confined to a definition of material prosperity that hinges on the size of our personal "slice" of our planet's limited "resource pie," this contradiction will continue to covertly fuel all our large scale meme-wars, as various factions struggle to realize self-serving "stabilization" or "sustainability" strategies that shift the burden of population reductions and resource poverty onto social groups other than their own. The present global Terrorists VS Infidels, Christian/Muslim conflict, the economic/ideological struggle between Capitalism and Socialism, growing anti-immigrant sentiment among the citizens and governments of wealthy First World countries, and even New Age "Earth Changes" prophecies calling for the "natural" deaths of billions as the earth "balances Humanity's cancer-like spread" are all the product of memeplexes. While differing in surface details, they share deep, common roots in the tension between our human potential for unlimited growth and an increasingly inescapable awareness of the limitations to that potential imposed by our species' seclusion to a single, small planet.

Within the next 50 years, during the lifetime of the majority of individuals reading these words, Humanity's infinite growth potential VS finite planet conundrum, if allowed to simply run its course, will almost certainly be resolved through the elimination of some segment of human life on earth. In the reduction-through-affluence plan, it's the yet unborn children of the future that are sacrificed. The religious, economic and cultural variants mostly name their present-day targets out loud, investing enormous energy in demonizing their perceived enemies (Terrorists, Capitalists, Leftists, Infidels, Jews, Christians, Muslims, Gays, the "ultra-rich," the "useless eater" poor, etc.) and making shameless public preparations for their elimination or forced impoverishment. Reducing population by increasing material affluence may turn out to be, by far, the most

humane strategy for redirecting an earthbound Humanity toward "stabilization." But are we on board with its projected outcome of a planet of rich old people clinging forever to their stuff (even if we, personally, get to be the "new eternals"), and a stagnant, long term future that amounts to little more than a dull continuance of the status quo into perpetuity? Don't all the other competing plans out there amount to only slightly more Draconian versions of pretty much the same thing – idealized and intensely meme-driven wish fulfillment scenarios of what life in the present "ought to be like," infinitely extended into the future? A future Muslim planet that looks pretty much like a bigger version of the present Muslim world? A Christianized earth with a church on every corner and a Bible in every hand? A Capitalist globe glistening in space like a giant, blue shopping mall? A post-"Earth Changes" New Age wonder-world, with tribes of happy homesteaders drumming blissfully beside bonfires and singing *Cum-by-ya* across a lush, "naturally-depopulated" landscape?

Can any version of "sustainability" that accepts earth-boundedness as an invariable norm end in anything but death on a massive scale?

Can any population-reducing "sustainability/stabilization" plan, however successfully implemented, actually resolve our dilemma?

Is human prolificacy the real problem?

Picture a performing circus tiger, locked securely behind the long steel bars of its cage. Our eyes, on first glance, see "tiger" – bright reddish-gold fur, stripes like black lightning, simmering eyes like glowing coals of jungle fire. The great cat's massive size, brilliant coloring and fierce expression fill our hearts with awe and wonder… But, as we watch, the tiger's mouth opens wide in a mighty yawn of caged tedium, revealing gaping spaces where his saber-like fangs have been surgically removed. A small door opens and a plate of meat is slipped into the cage. The great beast slowly rises, then saunters with only mild interest toward

the long dead offering (no tracking, hunt or kill required). When his belly is filled, he'll be wheeled to the center ring, there to leap through fiery hoops, roaring in imitation of his breed's naturally ferocity for the pleasure of human children, following the commands of a colorfully-costumed trainer.

The human eye thrills to the sight of a tiger in the ring – but is it really a tiger? Defanged, declawed, denied the satisfaction of every natural instinctive drive, and condemned to life imprisonment pacing hard floors of steel cages and performing tricks with no natural parallel within the 70 million years of tiger evolution, is there really any true tiger left?

For at least 150,000 years (and, potentially, much longer, depending on how you define "human"), our species has been in large measure defined by our wildly prolific talent for unlimited physical reproduction. Planet earth, however, is a finite space which is incapable of supporting long term exponential human population growth. That much is simple math. But if we respond to the gradual transformation of our home planet from a wild open space for human expansion into a cage of limitation on future growth – a change that is a natural result of our species' long term *success* expressing our innate prolificacy, rather than of some unnatural deficit or failure on our part – by metaphorically and actually de-fanging, declawing, denying and in every way *de-naturalizing* ourselves in order to avoid outgrowing our cage, will what we become in the process be any more worthy of the epithet *human* than the imprisoned, performing circus cat can still be properly labeled *tiger?*

If, in our time, the unstoppable force of Humanity's natural biological prolificacy is genuinely crashing headlong into the unmovable object of our earthbound station, by the direction of what dark meme have we been led to identify human population growth as the problem to be resolved, and the culling of our own species as the common sense resolution to that impasse? Why not, to take one fairly obvious alternative solution, especially for those of us raised on Gene Roddenberry's hope-filled Star Trek

vision of the future, name Humanity's containment to this one small planet as the difficulty to be overcome, and work instead toward the mounting of an all-out, global rush to break free of our earthly bonds and inhabit endless space, spreading the human species first to the near shores of our resource-rich solar system, then on into our inconceivably spacious galaxy, and eventually, to the unlimited frontier of the whole vast Universe? What underlies our apparently-commonsensical and near-universal acceptance of the belief that we must now shrink to survive? Is that belief serving us?

6,499,311,408. A three day holiday weekend passed between the completion of the paragraph above and the drafting of these closing remarks. In the eight days it took to compose this chapter, world population increased by 1,606,516 individual human beings – the rough equivalent of the present populations of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, Hamburg, Germany, or the entire Asian Kingdom of Bhutan. Each of those lives is as precious to its possessor, and to the people who love them, as our own lives and those of our children, our families and our friends are to us. If we choose to look away from this Key Question, in the course of a few decades at most, we will see many times their number perish or be inhibited from bringing their unique perspective and potential into the world at the hand of one currently-operative or soon to be initiated "stabilization/ sustainability" population culling plan or another. We, and those we love, may well find ourselves among their number.

Before we can even begin to think seriously about designing an awakened and genuinely humane and sustainable human culture, on planet earth alone or across the whole vast cosmos, we must first resolve this primary question:

What is the value of human life?

Do we think so little of real flesh-and-blood human beings that we are willing to openly support, or surreptitiously endorse through inaction or willful ignorance, any "stabilization" or "sustainability" strategy that treats Humanity as, at best, a

diseased organ to be subjected to some variant of a "people-ectomy?" The sacrifice of some part of our number in service to the rest, as a surgeon might cut away pieces of a cancerous lung in hopes of preserving the "undamaged" remainder? Following the tiger in a cage metaphor, in the aftermath of any such surgical population reduction, regardless of the strategy utilized, would the human remainder preserved remain truly *human*, anyway?

If, instead, we choose to value every life, including those of future generations, acknowledging their entitlement to be born and to inherit a world worthy of a valued Humanity, and therefore choose to reject all "stabilization/sustainability" plans that fail to serve and preserve everyone equally, what other options are available to us?

Is it even possible to simultaneously sanctify the value of human life and resolve our species' *infinite growth/finite planet* dichotomy? If we answer yes, then we must not evade the natural follow-up question – *how?* If we answer no, then where do we go from here?

KEY QUESTION EXERCISE #4:
Choosing the Slain

This exercise will have a greater impact if you can complete Part I before reading the instructions for Part II. A blank page has been inserted between the sections to make this easier to accomplish.

Part I:

Locate a good world atlas and a current almanac that provides population totals and demographic statistics, such as percentage breakdowns of race, religion, gender, age, economic status, etc. for the world's continents, countries and individual cities (Internet databases containing the same information are fine). Your job as a "Chooser of the Slain" is to reduce world population by 2,000,000,000 (two billion, or two thousand million) souls – a conservative number in light of the projected outcomes of some of the "stabilization" strategies discussed above. Your goal is to, at the very least, buy some time for the human species by reducing competition for earth's limited resources. If you can find a way to leave an even potentially "sustainable" society in the wake of the destruction, more the better. If not, at least try to leave a viable civilization behind to pick up the pieces. You can apply any criteria you like for choosing who to eliminate and who to preserve. However you mete out the devastation, you must record in your notebook the actual locations you cull from. As much as possible, name, at the most specific, *individuals* you would mark for death, on up to *cities*, *regions*, or at the most generic, the *countries* you target for destruction. If you take out a whole continent, record each of the individual countries that make it up, and the exact number slated to die in each location. Keep working on your list until you have successfully eradicated your assigned 2,000,000,000, and you are satisfied that your choices reflect your best efforts to positively reshape the world, in spite of what you might personally think of the means.

This Page is intentionally left blank to allow Part II of the Choosing the Slain exercise to be concealed until the reader has completed Part I.

Part II:

Were you on the list? If you were, in what position? Were you first? Last? What about your children, spouse, parents, friends? Were some of them on the list, and not others? What qualified those who made the list for inclusion? If no one you know personally made it into the number of the slain, did you simply exclude them, *a priori*, from consideration? Or did you articulate reasons for saving them? Were those reasons justifiable or simply justifications?

Now get out a calculator. Look up the locations you culled from again, and tally the percentages slain in each of the following categories: *Race, Religion, Gender, Age, Economic Status*, and *Form of Government* (i.e., democracies, dictatorships, theocracies, etc.). Use only the largest demographic group for the location. If a country is 75% Muslim and 25% Christian, use only the 75% Muslim for you calculations. If statistics are not available for individual cities, use the demographics of the larger state or country in which the target is located as likely to be representative of the city's inhabitants. For each location, simply multiply the number slain times the largest demographic group in each category.

Example: The almanac shows a location from which you chose to eliminate 48,000 people to be 80% Caucasian, 60% Christian, 53% female, 40% over 60 years of age, 50% middle class, and 100% governed by democracy. You killed:

Race: 48,000 X 80% = 38,400 Caucasians
Religion: 48,000 X 60% = 28,800 Christians
Gender: 48,000 X 53% = 25,440 Women
Age: 48,000 X 40% = 19,200 Post-60 individuals
Economic Status: 48,000 X 50% = 24,000 Middle Class
Form of Government: 48,000 X 100% = 48,000 citizens of a democracy

When you have completed the calculations for all of the individual locations, compute grand totals for each of the specific demographic majorities (not the broad demographic categories) to determine how many Whites, Blacks, Asians, Indigenous Peoples, Christians, Muslims, Jews, Communists, etc. that you killed. Using this method, your "total kill," will appear to be a number vastly in excess of your assigned 2,000,000,000, but that's because we counted each person several times, once for each time they matched a demographic majority. For example, a 65 year old Caucasian-American, Christian woman earning $50,000 a year would have been counted six times in the example above, while a 30 year old African-American Muslim man earning a million dollars a year would have been counted only once, under Form of Government, since America is a democracy. It doesn't really matter for this exercise, though, since you are simply working to identify overall ballpark trends.

What patterns of prejudice or preference does your analysis reveal? Who fared the worst? Who, if anyone, was totally spared? Does the final demographic death toll of your personal global "stabilization" plan expose the influence of memes or memeplexes of which you were previously unaware? Your high-scorer in each demographic category (*Race, Religion, Gender, Age, Economic Status* and *Form of Government*) reveals a deficit in your personal knowledge of, and compassion for, specific others outside your habitual social comfort zone, while simultaneously presenting a golden opportunity to work toward awakening by consciously challenging the memes underlying your prejudice.

One of the best and most readily-available tools for gaining deep knowledge of people very different from ourselves is *Literature*, in both its written and cinematic forms. Unlike academic studies (History, Sociology, etc.), novels and movies created by and centered in the experience of individuals from unfamiliar cultures have a unique ability to slip past the

memetic censors fortifying our habitual illusory sense of "I." When we suspend disbelief, entrusting ourselves to the rhythmic narrative voice of a novel or the camera's-eye "point of view" of a film (a psychic suspension the study of academic subjects does not require of us), the experiences of the characters impact us psychologically and emotionally as if they were our own. Our customary "I" VS "Not I" stance toward other people's understanding of reality is undone, and we become fluid in relation to the fixed certainties memes rely on to maintain control over our minds. Story by story, film by film, our experience of reality becomes more diverse and inclusive, the boundaries of our dream-worlds expand, and we become freer.

Over the course of the next year, commit to reading at least three novels and viewing at least three films responsibly centered in and sympathetic to (as opposed to exploitative of) the cultural experiences of each of the high-scorers on your "stabilization" death toll list. When the year has passed, do this exercise again and see how your demographic choices have changed. Are previously hidden or newly-acquired prejudices revealed?

In Key Question Community groups, after everyone has had opportunity to work through the initial exercise, gather to discuss your results. Divide the group under the lens of each of the broad demographic categories in turn. How do the results of members sharing specific racial, religious, gender, age or economic status profiles compare? Who were the high-scorers in each category for the group as a whole? Commit to reaching out to individuals in your community with roots in those cultures/demographics, and if possible, bringing at least one person from each into full membership in your group within one year.

Chapter 11

Key Question #5
WHO'S IN CHARGE HERE?

Who are *They?*

We hear the *Great Ubiquitous They* (GUT) invoked nearly every time we overhear world events being discussed. *They* fix elections, *They* control the Media, *They* lock away the plans for Free Energy devices in *Their* Detroit safes, *They* cover up the truth, *They* aren't interested in what *we* have to say, *They* planned A, plotted B, and have C, D and E waiting in store for the little guy who doesn't go along… The GUT finds its way into conversations about our personal lives as well, as when *"They'd never let me do that," "They have all the power/money/resources, so I don't stand a chance," "They make the rules," "They say I have to (or can't)…"*

Is the Great Ubiquitous They a real person, group, corporation, government, secret society, cabal or network of conspirators out there in the world whose institutionalized unconcern for the needs of individual human beings makes resisting *Their* large scale machinations impossible or pointless? Is the GUT working invisibly toward the achievement of some agenda about which we have not been consulted, and with which we would probably disagree, if given a voice in the matter? On the personal scale, are there real people and forces in our environment working behind the scenes to thwart our idealism, shoot down our brightest ideas for improving the

world, and to erect barriers against our best efforts to succeed and be happy in life?

Let's begin this exploration by answering *yes*, because it is only by confirming the possibility that real forces "out there" might actually be working to limit our freedom, creativity, success and satisfaction in life – even if, in our personal circumstances, no such forces actually exist – that we can hope to look the Great Ubiquitous They in the eye, and begin to question the root assumptions feeding the power of this globally-pervasive and universally pernicious memeplex.

Whenever we use the term *They*, with a capital "T" (or similar terms that serve the same function, like *The Powers That Be, The Government, Big Business, Experts, "People Say…"* etc.), we grant whatever pronouncement we then attach to that source a kind of omnipresent, godlike authority the people with whom we are conversing, which could be ourselves if we are simply thinking our situation through, are automatically discouraged from challenging. For example, if I complain that, *"Bob Smith at the local DMV office…"* says I have to jump through whatever unpleasant or personally invasive fiery hoop of governmental regulation in order to renew my driver's license, chances are the friend I'm complaining to will respond with some version of, *"I'd call Bob Smith's supervisor…,"* or a recommendation to contact my legislator, or to look up the law for myself on the Internet to see if Bob is imposing real legal restrictions or just being a petty bureaucrat and creating unnecessary hassle. But if I say, *"Ugh! Now the Government is making me* (or worse, *us all*)*…,"* take exactly the same actions, my friend's options are in most cases reduced to a choice between sympathetically shrugging his shoulders and nodding his head in grim identification. Since what is most genuinely ubiquitous about the Great Ubiquitous They is our common (and wholly memetic) belief that, A) a nameless, faceless GUT exists "out there", and B) resisting its dictates is futile, my friend will almost certainly understand on an unspoken level that when I invoke (literally,

to call upon a higher power) the authority of *They* when framing my complaint, I am not really asking for ideas on how I might effectively respond to my plight. I'm asking for some kind of simple, human display of emotional solidarity in recognition of our common helpless state.

Why would I want that? No one is actually helpless against Bob Smith, or powerless before the directives of any specific policy, law or legislator. In the corporate sphere, everybody has a supervisor to whom lower-level decisions can be appealed. Written policies are written by people, and can be (and frequently are) successfully challenged and amended. In countries governed by democracies, we can always appeal, complain, cajole, petition, and protest laws or lawmakers we do not feel serve us well. If specific political scoundrels routinely abuse the formal authority of elected office, we can work to unseat them. If our governments of any form – democracies, dictatorships, socialist states, etc. – become so filled with scoundrels that they become ultimately compromised and unresponsive, we can mount a revolution. Such events are everyday occurrences all over the world.

No real source of externally-imposed limitation is ever actually ubiquitous in the sense implied by belief in the GUT. Rather, such coercive forces invariably emanate from the desks, pens, mouths, executive orders, etc. of specific individual people, legislative bodies, boards of directors, corporate flunkies, middle managers or CEOs. This is as true of any potential "corporate cabal," "secret society" or "network of global conspirators" that might really exist in the world as it is of our local Department of Motor Vehicles, telephone company or neighborhood elementary school. To the extent than anyone is actually out to get us in this world, their unwelcome intrusions into our lives are never genuinely faceless acts of power. Individual people with faces and names and lives and loves and needs and desires and fears much like our own take specific

actions against or make demands of us, toward which we are called to respond.

People pursuing exceptionally noxious agendas often seek to hide behind the monolithic facades of obscure governmental departments, multinational corporations, think tanks, global trade or banking organizations, etc. But such GUT "Trojan Horses" are universally filled with ordinary, flesh and blood human beings who make choices and take actions for which we are free, at any time, to hold them personally accountable, if we can find the courage to ferret them out and call them to task. Even where there is a real threat of retaliation for resisting such intrusions, as when opposing the actions of an oppressive regime puts us at risk of arrest and imprisonment, what we feel compelled to resist are always specific actions, policies or requirements set in motion by identifiable individuals or groups. We may choose not to resist, for fear of incurring the threatened reprisal, but we are at least making a conscious choice, and not merely surrendering to the irresistible mandates of some invisible and ubiquitous force of nature.

When we invoke the GUT, we undermine all of that. The moment we speak or even think the word *They* or its equivalent in explaining our predicaments to ourselves or each other, we have washed away the faces and generalized the source of our unease in such a way as to create the appearance of personal powerlessness. By failing or refusing to identify and hold accountable the specific individuals or groups responsible for the personal and global challenges we face, we at once surrender our ability to understand the actual scope of the issues before us, and relinquish responsibility for taking action on our own behalf, or for the benefit of others.

If *They* can't lose, and consequently *we* can't win, why even try?

This is a critical distinction. Beyond the scope of genuine and easily recognized forces of nature (disease, weather, earthquakes, random accidents, etc.), no challenge to the health, happiness,

freedom or integrity of any human being, on the smallest or largest scale, anywhere on earth, is ever the result of actions taken by faceless, ubiquitous godlike entities or forces, such as are implied by our common belief in the Great Ubiquitous They. Instead, individual human beings, sometimes working in groups and/or exercising the formal authority of government, corporate, religious, social or other positions of power, carry out specific actions and pursue concrete agendas we can identify, understand, and respond to. We have the power to weigh the options available to us, make appropriate choices, and, if we decide it is in our best interest to do so, initiate countermeasures of our own.

When we invoke the GUT, we agree to go along with the pretense. We trade power for paralysis. Specific sources of attack become unidentifiable, motives and connections blur into meaninglessness, and true choice disappears as we are left, at the very best, to feebly select between equally-repugnant forced pseudo-options. By way of example, Presidential elections in the American two-party political system come immediately to mind. When was the last time most Americans really wanted to be led by either one of the officially-proffered candidates, as opposed to merely casting their vote for the one who appeared to represent the "lesser of two evils?"

What we accomplish when we invoke the GUT is far less *the relinquishment of our personal power to choose* than it is our exercise of that power to willfully *choose personal powerlessness.* When faced on both the personal and the planetary scales with frustrations, difficulties and challenges we know must logically result in one way or another from the bad behavior of specific other human beings (even if they are distant or "hidden" individuals, like legislators, corporate executives, academics locked away in their ivory towers, spies or criminals, etc.), why do we so frequently, and with so little apparent regard for our own best interests, leap to reframe our circumstances in terms that limit or altogether disable our ability to effectively respond?

Sigmund Freud insightfully observed that human beings are creatures which, beyond all the excuses and rationalizations we routinely throw up to camouflage our true motives, even from ourselves, make most of our decisions based on a simple principle of pursuing pleasure while seeking to avoid pain. Our feelings of powerlessness before the irresistible influence of the Great Ubiquitous They can be a source of tremendous pain for a lot of people, especially for those Stage Two seekers who have awakened sufficiently to understand that the collective dream is not going well, and who express a sincere desire to transform themselves and their world. Having developed at least a partial awareness of the root issues underlying their personal and our shared planetary discord, and being fully capable of taking the next step of identifying specific culprits, including their own counterproductive habits, and taking focused actions aimed at initiating positive change, they deliberately choose overwhelm and suffering instead. They invoke the GUT's almighty godlike hand to claim world-weary powerlessness, and absolve themselves of all responsibility for the dream's ultimate outcome.

"I'm just one person," they sigh.

But if Freud was right, no one would do that. No one would surrender the hope of future pleasure, freedom and personal power to be gained by taking charge, throwing off oppression, and creating a world better tailored to our liking in exchange for the certainty of present-moment frustration and pain, and the imposition of potentially long term, often crushing limitations to our pursuit of future happiness.

Yet, that's exactly what we do, time and time again. *Why?* Could it be that the pain generated when we choose powerlessness is made acceptable by the veiled presence of some compensating, and disproportionately greater pleasure? What could possibly be so appealing?

Three contenders come immediately to mind:

- *The pleasure of sleep*. Few would deny that physical sleep in our beds at night is a deeply pleasurable experience. After a long day fulfilling life's sometimes grueling demands, our bodies and minds grow weary, and we begin to crave the comfort of our blankets and pillows, our soft, enveloping mattresses. We long to sink like stones into the deep and comforting, responsibility-free waters of our dreams. Surrendering to the GUT frees us equally, in waking life, from responsibility for playing any active role in shaping the events that impact our, and everybody else's, lives. If, like the mysterious unconscious forces that script our nighttime dreams, *They* control the events of waking reality, we are under no pressure in the face of personal or global events to do anything more than *"go with the flow…"* With the GUT in charge, we remain at all times free to sleep peacefully and enjoy the dream.

- *The pleasure of guilt-free complicity*. We often enjoy pointing out what's wrong with the world, but balk to find our pointing fingers waggling before our own faces in the mirror. The threat of global warming scares and angers us – but not so much that we'll stop driving our own gasoline-powered vehicles, heating our homes in the winter, or relying on the prefabricated products of petroleum-driven industry in order to slow its pace. We decry the impact on the world's poor of aggressive global "Americanization" – but not enough to jeopardize our good jobs with American companies, our personal fortunes invested in American stocks, or the success of our privately owned American businesses or foreign corporations that do business with American companies in order to effect change. We teach our children the importance of racial and social diversity, but cultivate friendships only with people who look, think, and act like ourselves. But if *They* control energy policy and won't let us get off oil, and *They* are plowing ahead with "Americanized" corporate globalism no matter what anybody says or does about it, and *They* choose not to live around here, so we really have no

choice about who we socialize with, etc., then there's really nothing we can do about any of it, anyway, so there's no point being too extreme… Invoking the GUT frees us to remain personally invested in the very things we know to be sources of suffering in our personal and collective lives. What the GUT sets in motion can't be challenged or changed, so why try? And who can blame us for taking advantage of opportunities to benefit from conditions that can't be changed? In a self-deceptive end-run around the whole concept of personal accountability, we shift responsibility for the "way things are" to the Great Ubiquitous They, simultaneously protecting the status quo in which we are heavily invested, and eschewing all liability for, and appropriate guilt over, our personal complicity in the world's suffering. After all, we are *"just one person"* with no power to change anything, anyway.

- *The pleasure of extended childhood*. When we were young, our parents played a ubiquitous role in our lives that is extraordinarily reminiscent of our adult relationship with the GUT. They set the rules by which we were required to live. They made most of our choices, determining where we could or could not ride our bicycles, approving or vetoing our friendships, enrolling us in Boy or Girl Scouts, signing us up for piano lessons, meting out and taking away allowance money based on our compliance with their commands. Psychologists define maturity as development of the capacity to make our own choices and direct our own lives – but a lot of people never become comfortable wielding that level of responsibility. Far beyond the chronological age at which parental dependence is appropriate, many strive to maintain the "golden cocoon" of childhood innocence in which they remained perpetually cared for and existentially blameless in exchange for wielding little or no power. They attribute their adult travails to the workings of "ubiquitous outside forces," and rely on obvious parental projections to impose black and white rules for traversing

adulthood's confusing twists and turns. They surrender personal power to domineering spouses, imagined Mother or Father deities that, in temperament, strikingly resemble idealized flesh and blood human parents, government programs that regulate behavior and pay benefits to those who meet specified guidelines, cult leaders willing to bear responsibility for every aspect of a follower's life in exchange for blind obedience, etc. Surrender to the GUT allows many people to remain responsibility-and-authority-free children for the whole of their lives. And if you enjoyed childhood and/or find adult responsibility burdensome, that can be a very appealing bargain.

One theme all of the bullet points above have in common is *the avoidance of personal responsibility*, and encouraging such avoidance does appear to be a primary function of our belief in the Great Ubiquitous They. Belief in the GUT also allows us to maintain peaceful psychic slumber in the face of endless daily reminders that things are not as they seem, and that more is possible for us as individuals and as a species than our present understanding of reality even begins to hint at. To the extent that challenges and difficulties can function as "alarms" awakening us to the dreamlike quality of our meme-possessed waking lives, reflexive surrender to the GUT enables us to swat such disturbances away as we would a screaming clock in the darkness. Invocation of the GUT is a prime memetic "banishing spell" by which Stage One peaceful sleepers are empowered to indefinitely ward off the fitful throes of Stage Two awakening.

Is that your goal?

Who's in charge here?

KEY QUESTION EXERCISE #5:
Accountability Mapping

There's a story about a man who goes backstage at a circus, where he sees an 8,000 pound elephant secured to a post using a single inch-thick piece of rope looped around the animal's ankle. "Are you out of your mind?" he chides the elephant trainer. "That elephant could snap that rope with one kick!" The elephant trainer nods his head. "She doesn't know that, though," he replies. "When she was a baby, that rope was strong enough to hold her, and she got used to it. Now, when she feels it tugging on her ankle, she doesn't even try to escape!"

Discovering and snapping all of the "ropes" of limitation with which we have allowed ourselves to become bound can be a lifelong undertaking, so don't set a time limit on this exercise. Work instead toward establishing a permanent habit of acknowledging feelings of powerlessness – instantly, in the moment such frustrations arise – as signs of mystification by belief in some version of the Great Ubiquitous They.

Remember that the GUT is a predatory memeplex capable of disguising itself behind a wide variety of facades. But however dissimilar and apparently-unique our invoked *Theys* may seem on the surface, manifestations of the GUT can be universally identified by their deep, signature effect on our minds and behavior. Like the elephant in the story, our first, well-trained response to the tug of apparent limitation is *surrender*. Of course we are helpless. There's nothing we can do… And so we fail to try. We accept predation and containment by cords our feeblest kick could easily dislodge.

From now on, the moment feelings of powerlessness, limitation or overwhelm assault you, do the following:

- *Walk away*. Change your scenery. Remove yourself from the environment in which your sense of powerlessness arose, including the company of all people involved in the situation.

Reject out of hand any pressure, applied by others or by yourself, to make snap decisions. Where you go is irrelevant, so long as it is in no way connected to the issue at hand, and no one but you that is in any way related to the situation or its outcome is present.

- *Draw an Accountability Map*. In your notebook, work out, as specifically as possible, the exact details of the situation before you. What actions have been taken? What individuals, by name, took those actions? Who may have asked or ordered them to act (which is, itself, a secondary action you want to record and assign a name to)? Whenever a *They* crops up, in any form, break it down. Ask *Who? What? When? Where? How?* until you have drawn a thorough "map" of the situation before you that is 100% *They*-free. If research is required, such as finding the names of specific legislators or corporate executives, for example, do it now. Very often, honest questioning will reveal at even the very first or second levels of accountability mapping that the chief actor behind our "powerless-against-the-GUT" dramas is *us* – sometimes as a consequence of our own actions, other times as a result of inaction when action was called for. This is important self-knowledge. When accountability mapping reveals your own complicity in your dilemma, write it down. Name the action or inaction you contributed to the situation, and write your name next to it. Keep working and reworking your accountability map until all mystification has been dispelled, and the chain of choice-action-choice that brought your present situation into being is clearly visible.

- *Brainstorm*. By now you should have one, two, three or more unambiguous actions that were taken by specific people mapped out before you. Brainstorm each in turn, identifying as many potential counteractions as you can think of in ten minutes. Use a clock or timer to make sure that when your ten minutes are over, you stop. As with all brainstorming, at this

stage in the process, all ideas are good ideas. Don't judge or censor your possibilities in any way. The sky's the limit. What might you do if there were no limitations whatsoever on your freedom, strength, courage, resources, etc.? Think as fast and freely as you can, and write everything down. When you have finished brainstorming the first action, allot the second its own 10 minutes, and so on until all actions have been addressed.

- *Assess*. Bring your critical faculties to bear on the possible counteractions you have brainstormed. You are already way beyond *They* or any sense of powerlessness – did you notice? Now you can honestly assess the real-world value of each possible action in turn, in preparation for choosing your most appropriate response to a situation over which you have already taken charge. You now impose your own frames of reference and relevance, rather than having the limits of possibility dictated to you. Along your way to this point, much will already have become crystal clear. Where you are personally liable and what you can do to right your wrongs and ensure that the future will not bring a repetition of the past should be abundantly clear. Where counteractions on your part stand to further complicate the situation, rather than alleviating it, should now be equally apparent. Where counteraction is necessary or at least appears likely to be beneficial, you have a neat list of specific measures you can act upon, as opposed to the vague cloud of fear, ambiguity and victimization with which you began. For each mapped action you decide it is in your best interest to respond to, select at least two brainstormed potential counteractions for serious consideration, and rework them into clear action statements, beginning with a forceful, *"I will…,"* followed by the action. Don't use any "soft" words like "if," "maybe" or "might." Think of your action statements as magical incantations, counter-spells to the GUT's sleep-inducing curse. Your magic must be stronger, so don't water it down!

- *Choose to choose*. With your written action statements before you, take a moment to consciously acknowledge that, whatever response to your dilemma you now choose to act upon, even if your choice is to take no action, you are, in fact, *making a choice*. Your deeply considered, carefully-planned response is an act of personal will that no one on your accountability map, no person or circumstance on earth, and no "ubiquitous force" anywhere in the universe ever had the power to wrest from you. Many events occur in the course of a lifetime over which we have little or no control – but our response to those events is always ours to choose. In spite of memetic assertions to the contrary, our power to choose is granted by no institution or entity outside ourselves. Our authority to consciously craft our willful response to life events, as well as our complete personal responsibility for every consequence of our response, is intrinsic to human consciousness. It is every bit as present in a prisoner of war camp as it is in our comfortable homes, as available at our peaks of emotional upheaval as it is at our moments of greatest relaxed mental clarity, and as necessary to exercise in the face our weakest cravings for outside direction and comfort as it is when unchallenging circumstances make bold action easy and relatively risk-free. By consciously choosing to choose, by willfully centering ourselves in awareness of our ultimate freedom to reject memetic scripts and act outside the illusory bonds of limitation and lack memes impose on our dreaming minds, we fundamentally reorient ourselves – not only in relation to the personal dilemma that once left us feeling powerless, but to dream-reality in general. Having successfully utilized our accountability map, our brainstorming, and our assessment skills to analyze and take charge of our *external situation*, we now shift our *internal focus* from a position of victimization, of being helplessly acted upon, to one of willful actor within the dream. We may still be asleep, but now we are dreaming lucidly. Awake within the dream, what happens next can never be wholly determined by any power outside

ourselves. By choosing to choose, we willingly don our role as conscious creators of reality, and accept all the personal responsibility and power that role prescribes.

- *Choose*. Select the action statement or statements you will carry out in response to your dilemma.

- *Act*. Take the action. Accept responsibility for the consequences of your choice, both expected and unintended. As new dilemmas arise, either in response to your actions or as new, unconnected events, don't waste time feeling powerless or overwhelmed. Immediately walk away, and begin working your way through the process again.

If this method of consciously analyzing and taking control of your life, event by event, seems unduly complex or difficult, realize that the technique you are currently using to navigate life – and you *are* using a technique, whether you're aware of it or not, very likely the first method you ever learned or worked out for yourself as a child, however ineffective – is almost certainly considerably more complex than the accountability mapping exercise outlined above. You're just used to it. You've been following your present problem solving process for a long time. You're good at it. It no longer appears to take any effort at all. But if your reflexive response to life events leads even occasionally to overwhelm, surrender to the GUT, and a sense of personal powerlessness, you can retrain your mind. With practice, accountability mapping, brainstorming, choosing to choose, etc. can become as internalized, reflexive and comfortable as the habitual, and generally far less effective stance toward life you devised or learned in childhood. The resulting positive changes in your experience of yourself and your world will astound you.

In Key Question Community groups, partner members into subgroups of two to four people who agree to help each other

work through the accountability mapping process on a daily basis until it becomes habit for all concerned. Subgroups can provide designated safe havens for "walking away," remind each other to challenge unproductive mental habits, critique the honesty of specific accountability maps (who is being intentionally or unconsciously left off the map? Has the member honestly assessed his or her own participation in the problem?), share ideas for brainstorming, help assess the likely consequences of proposed actions, etc.

When local, national or global-scale events call for empowered mass response, the larger Key Question Community group can perform the accountability mapping exercise together, and cooperate to select and carry out appropriate group actions. Slightly modified, the accountability mapping exercise is also a great vehicle for addressing issues that arise between members or factions within large Key Question Community groups. In these circumstances, do not walk away from one another; instead, agree to complete the other stages of the exercise together, with the mutual goal of taking positive action to resolve difficulties in a way that benefits everyone, and which serves the larger goal of individual and group awakening.

Chapter 12

Key Question #6
WHAT WOULD BUDDHA EAT?

No one wants to see the earth's delicately-balanced natural environment collapse under the weight of human-generated pollution and runaway global warming. Nobody longs for the mass extinctions, very possibly including that of *Homo sapien*s, which would surely follow such an event. Nobody looks forward to sending their children to fight and die in bloody wars over access to oil and other dwindling natural resources. No one is okay watching 18 million people die yearly from starvation (the current annual global average) while millions, elsewhere, suffer epidemic obesity from consuming many times their fair share. No one is excited about the likely near-future extermination of billions in the name of "sustainability." But we falter before the apparent impossibility of tackling such issues head-on. The interwoven political, social, economic and ecological complexities fueling such catastrophic global events seem insurmountable – especially when we are each *just one person…*

If all that woeful complexity rings like a GUT-inspired siren-song to your ears, congratulate yourself on having already made substantial progress along your path to awakening! In truth, ninety percent or better of all the intertwined ills currently challenging Humanity, and through us, all life on earth, are

deeply rooted in only two globally-pervasive human activities – *the use of fossil fuels* and *eating meat*.

Chances are you're well aware of the dangers of petroleum. The Greenhouse Effect, the chief culprit behind global warming, is caused by the buildup in the earth's atmosphere of certain heat-trapping gases, the most prevalent of which is carbon dioxide produced when fossil fuels are burned (gasoline, home heating oil, natural gas, coal), and which accounts for approximately 85% of total US greenhouse emissions. The process of pulling oil out of the ground devastates the local environment. The non-fuel products we make from the stuff, like plastics, ink, synthetic rubber, paint, insecticide, fertilizer, dishwashing liquid, diapers, etc., are often themselves environ-mentally hazardous, practically non-biodegradable, or both. Oil spills routinely ravage coastlines and ocean ecosystems, often causing irreversible environmental degradation. Worst of all, as dependent on oil as we have become, both as a fuel source and as a raw material used in the manufacture of just about everything, in recent years the writing on the wall has become undeniably clear concerning oil's future – it's a non-renewable resource, and someday very soon world supplies are going to run out. Predictions of a fast approaching "oil crash" have become a hot topic with book authors and Internet bloggers. Even global mega-corporations like British Petroleum, whose trademarked "BP" logo is now said to stand for "Beyond Petroleum," have begun to very publicly promote alternative fuels research. In the face of soaring energy prices, increased global temperatures and violent weather patterns, melting polar ice caps expected to result in disastrous increases in sea level, etc., it is no longer possible to deny the dangers of oil, for the planet and for people everywhere.

You may be less aware of the equally-disastrous and far reaching impact of eating meat, both on the environment and on world hunger:

- After Carbon Dioxide, the second most destructive greenhouse gas is methane, which is generated by the gastrointestinal processes of livestock, primarily cows, sheep and goats. Pig manure, when left to ferment in giant hog farm waste-pools, also produces hefty amounts of methane as it "cooks" in the sun. Additional sources of methane include landfills, the use of petroleum-based fertilizers, natural gas production, and coal mining. While accounting for only 12% of US greenhouse gas emissions, methane's impact on global warming is 21 times that of Carbon Dioxide.

- Nearly 70 percent of all corn and wheat grown in industrialized countries (36 percent worldwide) is fed to farm animals, instead of to people, with the vast majority of the meat those animals produce targeted for consumption in a handful of the world's wealthiest nations. The United States, China, Brazil and the European Union, with less than one third of the world's population, consume 60% of the world's beef, over 70% of the world's poultry, and over 80% of the world's pork – commercially farmed animals which, by the time they reach the dinner table, have already, themselves, consumed the lion's share of the world's cereal grains, an obvious recipe for starvation amongst the two thirds of planetary population not lucky enough to live in one of those four centers of affluence.

- Roughly one fifth of the world's land area is used for commercial grazing, twice that dedicated to raising crops for human consumption.

- It takes an average of 2,500 gallons of fresh water to produce a single pound of red meat – this while, globally, one in every five humans lacks access to clean water. 2.2 million people, mostly women and children, die every year from thirst, or from drinking contaminated water because no potable source is available.

- The industrial slaughter and butchering of 50,000,000,000 (fifty billion!) animals worldwide annually (a number which does not include fish), and the intensive processing and refrigerated storage required for meat products adds to their environmental impact an enormous post-farm investment of fossil fuel-generated electricity, which pumps more carbon dioxide into the atmosphere, exacerbating the Greenhouse Effect.

Oil use and meat consumption, combined, account for such a staggering percentage of Humankind's grossly oversized "ecological footprint," which is a measure of how much land and water is needed to produce the resources we consume and to dispose of the waste we produce, that it is almost impossible to find even one truly pressing contemporary issue challenging Humanity that cannot be traced directly to the doorstep of one or the other of these industries, and very often to both.

Which, in the end, is good news, because acknowledging the concrete causes – oil use and meat consumption – underlying most of our global scale difficulties, and holding accountable the real, flesh-and-blood people whose daily choices perpetuate those causes – ourselves, each other, world corporate and political leaders – empowers us to resolve a wide array of interconnected problems with just a few, well-targeted actions. This mini-exercise in accountability mapping makes abundantly clear that, in order to stave off global environmental meltdown, feed the world, and so significantly reduce the size of our "ecological footprint" that many times our present number can peaceably share the earth without straining its human carrying capacity (the maximum population of a given species that an area can support without reducing its ability to support that same species in the future), we do not need to waste even one more minute worrying over the mystifying political, social, economic or ecological dimensions of the challenges we face. All we have to do is stop using oil and stop eating meat.

It really is that simple. So why aren't we doing it?

Oil is, of course, the toughie. Until some new technology is developed to actually replace gas-powered vehicles, along with the infrastructure of highways, gas stations, repair shops etc. that supports them, we need our cars every day to get to work, to take our children to school, to transport food and other commodities, etc. Moving beyond oil will require us to wholly re-vision and reconfigure every aspect of our lives, from the products we use (try finding even one item in the room where you're sitting that does not have some kind of oil-based product in its composition, painted on its surface, etc.), to how we get around, to how we grow our food (the vast majority of fertilizers and pesticides are petroleum-based), heat our homes, and even entertain ourselves (TV's, computers, smartphones – they're all plastic, which equals oil!). The move from fossil fuels to renewable sources of energy is a change that will, sooner or later, be forced on our species as world oil supplies peak and rapidly dwindle to zero in coming decades. Any steps we can take to help proactively pull the plug in advance of the inevitable crash, thereby reducing the extent of the long term environmental damage we'll have to recover from, are well worth the effort. We can build solar homes, purchase alternative-fueled vehicles, ride bicycles to work or school – these are all good and useful things. But even with them, when the "Peak Oil" turning point comes, for better or worse, whether our inevitable global energy watershed washes over us as an exciting opportunity or a terrible human tragedy, breaking free of oil dependency is a passage our species will traverse *en masse*, a great work we will all accomplish, or fail to realize, together.

Eating meat, we do alone. No law requires us to continue supporting the meat industry by purchasing and consuming its products. No new infrastructure is required for us to transition to a vegetarian diet. Meme-based cultural fears, especially in those aforementioned wealthy, meat-gluttonous regions of the world, that a meat-free diet can't supply sufficient protein or other important nutrients has been proven false by all manner

of scientific research in recent years, not to mention by the lives and generally exceptional health of generations of vegetarians and vegans in those same wealthy countries, and for thousands of years in India, China, Japan and other Asian nations where Hinduism and Buddhism are widely practiced.

While eating meat cannot be shown to offer any health *benefit* whatsoever over a plant-based diet, just about every health - *deficit* you can think of has been directly or indirectly linked to meat consumption, from breast and colorectal cancer to cardiovascular disease to obesity, and on and on and on… Conservative estimates by health care professionals suggest that, in the United States alone, between $60 and $120 billion dollars a year in medical expenditures can be directly attributed to the consumption of meat. The US meat industry, in 1997, had gross receipts totaling roughly $100 billion, making the whole industry a net loss for the American economy when the health effects are factored in.

Frances Moore Lappe's 1971 bestseller *Diet for a Small Planet* alerted the world more than three decades ago to the devastating impact of meat consumption on the environment and world hunger. It revealed an earth-friendly, people-valuing path to transforming global culture through vegetarianism which, had we followed it, would almost certainly have allowed us to evade altogether, or at least to greatly minimize the impact of, most of the self-wrought travails now threatening our species.

And yet, we keep eating meat. At the time of this writing, it would be statistically accurate to predict that, at best, only about one in every ten people reading these words is a practicing vegetarian (in the USA – Brits fare a bit better at about 2 in 10). Globally, while hard statistics are few and far between, most sources suggest that the worldwide vegetarian population probably averages a sad one to two percent. Traditional, Third World meat-eating cultures may not be aware of or trust the scientific and medical information we have acquired concerning the effects of meat consumption on health and longevity.

Nomadic lifestyles, the use of land for grazing which could not support agricultural farming, and other location-specific factors may posit a different set of criteria people in less-affluent parts of the world must consider when making their dietary choices. But if you live in the United States, the European Union, China or Brazil, chances are that you are eating meat one or more times every day, with full awareness (if you weren't aware of any of these things before reading this chapter, you are now) that doing so is virulently unhealthy, massively destructive to the environment, and an act of personal complicity in the deaths of 18 million people worldwide every year from starvation, malnutrition and other hunger-related causes.

Are you okay with that? If you are not on board with the verifiable negative impact of the global meat industry, on the planet and on people, but you intend to go on eating meat anyway, how do you explain that to yourself? If even one of the 18 million individuals around the world slated to die this year for lack of sufficient healthy food could look you in the eye and hold you personally accountable for your actions, would you explain your choice differently? Would you reconsider? Why?

While it is true that all Stage One and many Stage Two sleepers, to once again quote Jesus, *"…know not what they do…"* regarding the larger impact of their actions on the world, or for that matter on themselves, it is equally true that no one can seriously expect to reach Stage Three awakening and beyond without relinquishing once and for all the easy "ignorance is bliss" comfort of soothing dream-world unaccountability.

Whether we are aware of it or not, whether we like it or not, every action that we take, every choice that we make, has concrete, real-world consequences, for ourselves and for others. We can embrace this fact and take willing responsibility for consciously crafting our individual lives, and through them, our common destiny. Or we can eschew accountability for the direction of our lives and our impact on the world, and simply drift about like leaves on the wind, blowing this way and that in

blind subservience to our memes. We can commit to the realization of our highest personal potential, the manifestation of our ideal life, and the creation of a bright future for Humanity and the world. Or we can dedicate our existence to nothing grander than undisturbed slumber, the maintenance of the status quo, and the nourishment of the parasitic memes we allow to feast on the very personal energy which, if made available to us, would quickly catapult us to awakening.

All of the facts and statistics in this chapter are taken from legitimate, respected sources – no hyperbole or propaganda. Feel free to do your own research and draw your own conclusions. But if, in the end, you agree that the facts here presented are valid, and yet you choose to continue living your daily life as if they were not, or as if you are somehow exempt from personal responsibility for the consequences of your choices (or worse, taking the position that you'd like to change, but *They* won't let you) what larger meme are you serving in lieu of what you know to be the truth? If your knowledge and your behavior are out of sync, what payoff are you receiving in exchange for tolerating the psychic dissonance? When what you inevitably purchase with your prize is global warming, the annual deaths of millions, and the hastening of the breach of earth's human carrying capacity and the likely eventual extinction of our species, what payoff could be worth the price?

KEY QUESTION EXERCISE #6:
By Their Goals You Shall Know Them

Russian mystic George Ivanovich Gurdjieff, who brought the Fourth Way spiritual system to the West in the early 20th Century, taught that good and evil exist only in relation to a goal. That it is only when we know where we are going, when we have established clear personal objectives and unflinchingly dedicated our lives to their achievement, that we can honestly

measure the value of our choices and behavior. In our struggle to achieve Stage Three awakening, Gurdjieff's aphorism can be a handy tool for helping us break the hypnotic spell of all the context-free, so-called "objective Goods and Evils" preached by large scale memeplexes like religions, political parties, economic systems, etc. Guided by unambiguous goals, we need no longer passively petition invisible forces for direction – *Am I right? Am I wrong? Is this good? Is this evil?* Instead, we can take charge of our lives by actively measuring the relative value of all our options in clear context – *Do my proposed actions lead me toward or away from my chosen destination? Which of the options before me serve my goals, and which obstruct them?*

It is only when we have established clear goals that a question like "should I eat meat or be a vegetarian?" becomes meaningful. Either path pursued in banal imitation of forces outside ourselves (including this book) is memetic mimicry, and does nothing to free us from the hypnosis of Stage One sleep. We dream blissfully of our Cosmic Entitlement to Subdue Creation (I have heard Christians argue that the Bible *orders* them to eat meat), or conversely, of our enlightened "vegan superiority" to the lowly *Homo carnivorans* around us, who are just not smart enough to surrender to our advanced understanding… But when we are clear about what we want in life – *personal awakening, less suffering and greater happiness for ourselves and for the world, the transition of our species, en masse, to Stage Four Limitless Frontier consciousness* – no imitation is necessary. We need seek neither advice nor permission from any outside force concerning our choices in life. We need only examine our options with an open mind and ask, *does this serve or obstruct my goal?* – then answer honestly, and behave accordingly.

So step one of this Key Question Exercise is *set spiritual goals*. Do you really want to awaken? Are you ready for enlightenment? Can you commit to actually rolling up your sleeves and working hard toward planetary awakening and the hands-on creation of a bright future for Humanity? If your answer to these

questions is "yes," what are you willing to do, give and/or sacrifice in order to achieve your goals? If your answer to the first question is "no," or to the second, "nothing," why are you still reading this book? Take time right now to journal at some length in your notebook concerning these questions. Are you ready to commit to defined spiritual goals? If yes, spell them out. If no, what's standing in your way? Make a plan for overcoming any barriers you identify – then carry it out!

Another way to benefit from Gurdjieff's unique understanding of the relationship between goals and choice is by turning his maxim around. In the absence of consciously-chosen goals, close examination of how we habitually define good and evil, and of the choices we make based on those definitions, can bring to light the hidden memetic agendas which covertly direct much of our behavior. If it is only when we consciously pursue clear goals that we can know good from evil, then, reversed, whenever we find ourselves weighing "goods and evils" in daily life, and making choices based on those measurements, we can rest assured that, whether we are aware of them or not, *goals are being pursued*. Just as observing a boat turn against the current tells us that a rudder must be secreted beneath the water's rippled surface, wherever questions of good and evil arise, goals must be present, invisibly steering our lives, choice by choice, toward some destination which, if it has not been consciously chosen by us, must then be memetic. There is no third option. When we observe that our knowledge and behavior are out of synch, as when we understand the damage eating meat, burning oil, over-consuming, etc. inflicts on ourselves and on the world, but we choose to pursue such activities anyway, questioning the "goods" by which we justify such choices to ourselves and to others can offer important clues toward recognizing and overcoming the memes and memeplexes most successfully controlling our minds.

Step two of this Key Question Exercise is to closely observe the contradictions in your thoughts, feelings and behavior that

committing to concrete spiritual goals will inevitably bring to light, as displaced memes struggle to regain control over your thought processes and lull you back to sleep. This is a permanent habit to establish and practice every day of your life. Whenever you witness your actions – or even the temptation to act – betraying your commitments, ask, "What am I labeling 'good' when I make this choice/take this action? What goal does that 'good' serve? When I abandon my own consciously-chosen objective in service to that 'good,' what meme-directed purpose am I pursuing in its place?

Awakening occurs when we break the power of memes to control our thoughts and perceptions, and the choices we make based on them. We cannot awaken without making new choices – conscious choices based on an honest appraisal of the facts, untainted by our personal subjective opinions, tastes, prejudices or beliefs (i.e., our memes). Our new choices must be carefully measured, not according to any memetic scale of "objective Good and Evil," but rather in relation to each choice's likely impact on our ultimate ability to achieve our consciously-set spiritual goals and life objectives.

The facts are plain regarding vegetarianism VS meat consumption. If what you want from life is illness, environmental degradation, the starvation deaths of millions annually, and the likely demise of billions in the name of desperate "stabilization" strategies geared toward maintaining the gluttonous lifestyles of the wealthy few, consume away. If, on the other hand, you aspire to achieve personal awakening, to manifest your ideal life and to contribute to the positive evolution of the human species and the creation of a bright, enlightened future for all Humanity, then stop eating meat now. These are paths that lead in opposite directions, and you cannot simultaneously walk both. Your choice of futures begins with you next meal.

In Key Question Community Groups, create enclaves of vegetarian culture. Cook together, eat together, share meat-free

fellowship. Study vegetarian nutrition and cooking, and educate each other. Support one another's efforts to set and actively pursue spiritual goals, including, but not limited to, vegetarianism. Help each other to identify the many memes such efforts are guaranteed to shake loose, and to overcome, rather than succumb to, their hypnotic power.

NOTE: If I appear in this chapter to be advocating the acceptance of a "vegetarian meme," as opposed to the more general "opening of the question," recommended in the Key Question Technique instructions that prefaced this section of the book, you have a point – *but this is a special case*. Every human being must eat every day to continue living. We do not have the option of truly stepping back from the question to consider it at length. In view of the facts, or even the "potential facts," if you're not convinced yet, and intend to pursue your own research, isn't it better to follow the sage advice of the Greek physician Hippocrates (or, in some sources, his Roman counterpart, Galen) and *"First, do no harm,"* minimizing your impact on the environment and other people by "trading memes" in the short run, and practicing vegetarianism while you work to open and explore the larger question?

Chapter 13

Key Question #7
WHERE ARE WE GOING?

A *paradigm* is a set of elemental assumptions, values, beliefs and practices held in common by a community or professional discipline. Paradigm is another way of saying *consensus reality* – what everybody in a shared milieu agrees is and is not real. Such agreements can vary greatly from place to place and time to time, depending on memetic factors like whether we live amongst Muslims, Christians or Secular Humanists, or find ourselves governed by socialists, fascists, technocrats or theocrats, etc. On the scale of global events, wildly differing cultural paradigms held in different parts of the world account for most international and intercultural conflict. What one culture labels "good," another labels "evil." Since each is convinced their own cultural consensus describes the only "real reality," they assume the other side, to disagree, must be either crazy or wicked. Where avoidance is not possible, war seems justified, genocide necessary, violent conquest reasonably redefined as liberation. One culture's patriot becomes another's insurgent, one religion's saint another's infidel.

The unique "box" each of us dreams in, as described in Chapter One of this book, is our personal paradigm, a distinctive consensus concerning what reality is, how it functions, who's in charge, and what is and is not possible, for ourselves and for

others, that has been reached, not by an outer community of people, but rather, among the singular collection of memes and memeplexes housed in each of our individual brains. The fact that no two people can ever share identical life experiences, encounter the same influences, or absorb them in precisely the same way assures that the exact mix of memes inside each of our heads will always be as irreproducible as a snowflake, the only one of its kind anywhere, in any time. That's what makes the illusion of individual personality, of a consistent and persistent "I," so convincing. Like the frame around a picture, the covers of a novel, or the screen on which a movie is projected in the darkness, our personal paradigm provides a unique, all-encompassing, and most often wholly unconscious context in which we experience the events of our daily lives. It provides an enveloping *"center of my own small world"* backdrop against which the disparate thoughts, feelings, labors, chance meetings, random perceptions etc. we encounter each day are shaped into a cohesive narrative, an apparently meaningful, cradle to grave story in which we are the main character.

All stories have beginnings, middles and endings. Stories are, by nature, *teleological* in that we generally understand those beginnings and middles to be moving purposefully toward predestined ends. When we read a novel or watch a movie, we trust the author or director not to distract us with irrelevant action or dialogue. We expect every aspect of the storytelling process to serve the final climax and summation. The details of that ending may remain a mystery right up until the closing frames or pages, but we trust along the way that, when the veil is finally lifted, we won't be left scratching our heads, thinking, *"Hmmm… Didn't see that coming…"* Our satisfaction depends on being able to recognize, at story's end, how every element encountered along the way contributed meaningfully to the plot's ultimate resolution, and even made it inevitable. All the loose ends are tied up. In the teleology of storytelling, the insight, moral lesson, emotional transformation, etc. with which

the story concludes becomes the reason for telling the tale in the first place. All beginnings lead purposefully toward inexorable ends, futures that draw the past and present toward them like invisible magnets in the distance.

Our real lives, in contrast, are filled to overflowing with irrelevant action and dialogue. Amongst the actual daily events we move between, or, more often, juggle simultaneously as we attend to life's demands, there are no clear plotlines. There are no sharply demarcated parallel streams of experience like TV channels running separate programs that never touch or intertwine, and between which we are free to move with the simple tap of a remote button. In real life, things happen all at once, we respond, and in retrospect, we invent stories that enable us to artificially separate, sort, remember and share our perceptions and experiences in a meaningful way. Which sounds like a great and useful ability until we remember that all such sorting and assignment of meaning falls within the purview of memes.

Any apparent teleology perceived in the lives of Stage One and Two sleepers is exactly that – *only-apparent*, and never real. Until we awaken, our lives have no conscious author or director capable of crafting and intentionally manifesting a genuine "life story." We settle, instead, for a kind of ersatz, meme-driven, teleological reverse-engineering in which chance endings determine where, in retrospect, we perceive the story to have begun, as when an account of events that end in divorce, for one person, begins with the wedding, while for another the story may begin with a previous divorce and lessons not learned, while a third storyteller starts with childhood and witnessing his or her own parents' messy breakup. None of the three versions of the story is true in any objective sense. Each day, events occur that impact our ability to tolerate marriage to our spouse, but in between such events, and even in the moment they are happening, we go to work, raise our children, talk with friends, cook, eat, garden, read, etc… These things all happen together;

they are intimately entangled in the present moment of the "now" in which they occur. It is only later that we separate selected strands out of life's skein and weave from them a story, a highly-selective, and most often self-serving, "slice of life" we repeat to ourselves and to others until it becomes an unshakeable pillar of our personal paradigm, destined to shape our experience and interpretation of future events. Most of our interpersonal conflicts stem from the clash of alternate, contradictory "storylines" woven from roughly the same events. For me, it happened this way. Your version of the story is different. You must be either crazy or wicked.

In the process of reverse-engineering the story of our lives, we most often take (or mistake, as the case may be) the lesson learned, the moral, the final life or mind changing impact of a given chain of events to be the reason the experience occurred in the first place. *Because we needed to learn X, Y and Z*, we tell ourselves in hindsight, *A, B and C had to happen just as they did*. Over the course of a lifetime, innumerable such "story strands," woven together, convince us that our lives consist of a single braid stretching from our births to our deaths. We perceive each twist and turn along the way guided by the hand of some invisible intelligence who all along knew the final purpose we were born to serve. That “final purpose” is only revealed to us, however, in the eleventh hour, when all our life achievements, failures, victories and defeats can be seen in full retrospect and judged subjectively in relation to where all the chips finally landed. Just as the beginning and middle of each individual story we tell ourselves along the way appear, looking back, to purposefully serve the end they reached (because it is only after events have reached their climax that we look back and select which "threads" we will weave into our narrative, and which we'll leave out), so too, our lives, reviewed at any point along the way, appear to be complexly intertwined but ultimately consistent narratives leading inexorably, even "divinely," to the very moment in which we choose to turn our attention to the past.

On the scale of Humanity's collective dream, we see a similar teleological factor at work. With mass events like war, pandemic disease or devastating natural disaster, the meme-inspired stories we tell ourselves and each other enable such blatant absurdities as both sides in a battle believing that *"God is on our side…,"* or celebrity clergymen proclaiming violent weather to be the wrath of God on sinful cities, while unnamed thousands in the effected locations thank the very same God for saving them from the "Devil's Storm." Where no clear end is yet in sight – as with the greater "Human Story" of where, as a species, we come from, where we're going and, by inference, what we ought to be doing with our lives here in the middle of the story – how we interpret the meaning of today's events will depend largely on where we believe the storyline is destined to eventually lead us, on the imaginary future we choose to embrace, and from which we will "look back" to decide where we perceive the story to have begun. These two speculative poles – an imagined future that breeds a highly selective, and most often, equally-imaginary, vision of the past – work together to create the contextual pseudo-reality in which we will choose how to measure our experiences and make choices in the present moment.

Among all the religious, political, racial and cultural diversity coloring the global human landscape, every meme and memeplex inhabiting every human brain on earth participates in the telling of one or another of only three such grand, overarching "Human Stories." Every person, culture, nation, religion, philosophy, political or economic system – everything you can think of within the wide panoply of human life, ideas, beliefs, styles of governance, morality, ethics, literature, science and history (remember the look-back factor above) fits somewhere within and serves the "storyline" of one of just three comprehensive, competing memetic narratives. Like the various versions of the divorce story above, none are true in any objectively real sense. But because we believe in them, because

we live within them, psychically, rarely, if ever, even thinking of them as stories at all, but rather accepting them as unquestioned and unquestionable face value facts, these three mega-memes enjoy almost unchallenged control over how we process and understand our human experience. This is especially true regarding the question of where the human story will end – and based on that predicted, though as-yet-unrealized finale, both where it is perceived to have begun, and exactly where and when along the teleological timeline we perceive ourselves to be standing today.

These three competing, world-controlling mega-memeplexes are:

The Paradigm of Decline. In this story, Humanity was born in paradisiacal splendor. The world was pure and perfect and new. Life was easy and good. Whether by natural or supernatural causes, the situation changed. The Golden Age ended and life/civilization/society began a long, gradual slide down a slippery slope of physical, moral, intellectual and/or spiritual decay toward some inevitable future apocalyptic crash. This is the paradigm of Christianity, Islam, Judaism, and of vast swaths of Western culture, literature, law, government, science, etc. which remain to this day deeply rooted in this ancient Abrahamic worldview. This story fuels Hinduism as well, with its progression of Yugas, each more chaotic, violent and corrupted than the last, culminating in the eventual destruction of the world, and the "breathing in" of the spent universe by Brahmin.

We embody this story on a personal scale when we remember childhood as pure, perfect and innocent, and dread aging as a process of physical decline leading toward bitter, inevitable decrepitude and death. Most religions rooted in the Paradigm of Decline sweeten the ending by predicting renewal following the crash, as in Christianity's prophesied "New Heaven and New Earth" or Brahmin's expected "breathing out

again" of the revitalized universe in Hinduism. On a personal level, we, too, expect to be renewed after our individual deaths, by way of eternal life at God's side in Heaven, reincarnation into a new human body, etc.

But in the present moment, when neither personal nor planetary apocalypse has yet manifested, when the majority of memes housed in our brains reflect a Paradigm of Decline orientation, we will interpret events in light of that dire end's inevitable approach. If we bother to fight the decline we see in the world around us at all, we do so on principle only, rather than with the expectation of any long-lived success. Of course the world is screwed up, we think. We're fallen creatures – what else should we expect?

The Paradigm of Stasis. In all times and places there have always been large numbers of people who think of the future as little more than an extension, or at best a refinement, of the present, or who do not think very long or hard about the future at all. Though they may intellectually acknowledge that, of course, people lived differently in the past ("*We burn oil now, instead of wood, and we build skyscrapers instead of pyramids…"*), and will almost certainly live differently in the future ("*Those computers sure get better every year…"*), on a daily basis, they make the majority of their behavioral choices as if they considered neither proposition to be true or particularly relevant. In the Paradigm of Stasis worldview, life is considered to have always been enough like it is today that closer examination is unnecessary, and despite the Chicken Little bawling of extremists, things are likely to continue just as they are pretty much forever. This is the paradigm of unbridled Capitalism, the "American Dream," celebrity-obsessed *I gotta get mine, Yo!* MTV live-for-the-moment pop culture, Sex, Drugs and Rock & Roll, working for the weekend, etc. The Paradigm of Stasis equally underlies most economic, political and social Conservatism, as when a remarkable number of self-professed believers in

religious versions of the Paradigm of Decline actually live their lives centered in the Paradigm of Stasis, proclaiming their personally-held political opinions, social prejudices, jingoistic nationalisms and Puritanical moral absolutes to exactly mirror God's own, and devoting themselves to the task of creating national and global theocracies capable of imposing those beliefs and standards on everyone, everywhere, for all time. The only real change they embrace is toward the transformation of the current Status Quo into a stasis more to their liking – then it's business as usual forever!

On the personal scale, we live out the Paradigm of Stasis story whenever we coast through life with no thought of the future, never saving or investing, making no plans for an old age we'd rather not think about, or when we become so complacent in our pleasurable lifestyles that we refuse to acknowledge the impact of our choices on others, and find ourselves at every turn fighting off awareness of change in the world around us. The Paradigm of Stasis allows us to acknowledge that world oil supplies are running out, but to continue our present consumption habits just as they are, based on the assumption that it's "someone else's problem," and somebody, somewhere will surely come up with something soon. It allows us to eat meat with full knowledge that, by doing so we are poisoning our bodies and sentencing millions to death. It allows us to support politicians we know to be corrupt or even dangerous because they pander to our theocratic social agendas.

Left or Right, rich or poor, religious or secular, whether moved by the desire for raw physical pleasure or for the imposition of Puritan moral absolutes, for those whose lives are centered in the Paradigm of Stasis, the future is secured by the digging of one's heels into the soil of the present, and the insistence in the face of all evidence to the contrary that The Good Times, however we personally choose to define them, once achieved, can – *and should!* – roll on, unchecked, forever.

The Paradigm of Evolution. Here, simplicity leads to complexity, and complexity is, by and large, in its own right, good. In Biology, naturally-existing organic molecules are believed to have come together to form specialized proteins, which banded together to form cells, which in turn became plants, animals and people through a multi-billion-years-long process of natural selection. The scientific theory of evolution as described by Darwin is not teleological – life is not understood, scientifically, to be pursuing any specific end. There is continual change as complex creatures evolve new traits to better exploit changing environmental conditions, but movement is only in the direction of survival, and not the unfolding of any divine plan or the pursuit of any predestined goal. Though in constant motion, life has no destination. There is no future "ideal state" toward which life is considered to be moving.

Psychologically, socially, culturally, artistically and spiritually, however, the Darwinian model of evolution has – after significant, and often unacknowledged revision – been adopted to support a teleology of positive growth, of progressive personal and collective development, and of a seedling-like unfolding and flowering of immanent inner potential. This is the paradigm of self-actualization, Depth Psychology, New Age spirituality, the motivation-inspiration-self-development industry, as well as ancient Eastern religions like Buddhism and Taoism. The evolutionary paradigm underlies New Management practices in business, such as Continuous Quality Improvement, which creates informational feedback loops within an organization designed to generate constant positive change and a quickened ability to exploit new market niches. It holds sway wherever people agree that what's bad can be made good, what's good can be better, and the word "best" works best as a floating definition, a glittering carrot that lies always ahead of us as we continually sharpen our skills, develop our talents and discover and embrace new potentials in ourselves and the world.

When our personal story is centered in the Paradigm of Evolution, we see our own best years and any potential Golden Age for Humanity lying always before us in the future, and tend to view past events and present experience less as definitive indicators of who we are than as steps along a never-ending path of "becoming." Our definitions of what we expect to "become" may change many times over the course of a lifetime, but, in the present moment, we are nearly always motivated by a vision of what we hope to be or achieve in the next 5, 10 or 20 years. When our vision changes, as when new information requires us to reevaluate our plans, or we simply get distracted by a new, more exciting vision, we quickly rewrite our life stories to redefine abandoned goals as necessary, but incomplete, stages in a continual process of the refinement and more effective pursuit of our "true purpose."

Steeped in the future-focused Paradigm of Evolution, the present state of the world, the behavior of others, and the relative success or failure of our own lives are measured far less in light of what has occurred in the past, or even the recent present, than in contrast to the highest levels of future human development we can imagine. This often leads us, following Darwin's injunction that survival belongs to "the fittest," to show little compassion or even tolerance toward those we deem "unfit" by virtue of their contentment with the present or disagreement with our bright prognostications of tomorrow.

This description of the three mega-memes controlling our planetary human dream makes it appear that the Paradigm of Decline is cleanly rooted in yesterday, while the Paradigm of Stasis stakes its claim in today, and the Paradigm of Evolution in various possible tomorrows – but these easily-categorized temporal differences are not the real root from which our most pressing global difficulties spring. It's only when all three worldviews look ahead to the coming years, decades and centuries that the trouble begins. All of the present day, human-

survival-challenging clashes taking place between adherents of these disparate worldviews rise out of the deeply contradictory *visions of the human future* from which each paradigm "looks back" in order to construct its version of the human story to date.

A person who believes that we are broken, sinful creatures whose civilization is predestined by God to fall to ruins will, in the present moment, make very different behavioral choices in the face of common challenges than will someone who wants a future that looks just like today, except maybe with a fatter paycheck, a nicer house, a bigger-screened TV, etc. Those certain our present way of life can and should be maintained forever will weigh cries of social injustice, reports of natural resource depletion, or efforts to mitigate the environmental damage done by present day profit-gushing industry on a very different scale than will someone who envisions human spiritual and cultural perfection as a future state of wholeness to be attained through today's hard work and sacrifice.

To the extent that we perceive the world, ourselves and each other through the lenses of these mega-memes, we are, if only unconsciously, by crashing heads and working at cross-purposes, creating our chaotic present, choice by choice, in service to the contradictory ends each story envisions for our species. Common wisdom says, *"If you want a different future, work to change the present."* But the counterintuitive truth is that it is only when we re-vision our common future that the present can be made to yield to change. We will not likely take a single step out of our present darkness until we agree on a shared vision of Humanity's future capable of inspiring us to pursue it together.

Where are we going?

KEY QUESTION EXERCISE #7:
Paradigm Shifting

Examine your life through the lens provided by each of the paradigms described above. What kind of stories are you telling yourself? Journal at some length on the impact of the paradigms of Decline, Stasis and Evolution on at least these four areas of daily life:

- Your religion/spirituality
- Your romantic relationships
- Your family/home environment
- Your work life/career

Just as much of the conflict taking place in the world on an international scale is the result of clashes between these grand memeplexes, so their memetic reflections within our personal psyches create all manner of turmoil as they compete to control the reins of our perception and behavior. Do you long to embrace a process of spiritual evolution while you are committed to a religion steeped in the Paradigm of Decline? Has your relationship with your spouse fallen into ruin, while you expect your family and home life to maintain a happy stasis, or even evolve? Do you experience your marriage and family to be falling into disarray, even as your career evolves in new and exciting directions? Does your devotion to spiritual evolution mask a deep boredom resulting from a tediously static romantic, family and work life?

Determine which paradigm rules each of the four critical dimensions of your personal present moment experience. Feel free to explore any additional dimensions you consider especially important in your unique circumstances, such as *artistic expression* if that is a significant part of your life, but be

sure not to shy away from any of the main four. In your journal, write out the story each area of your life is fulfilling. Where does each "storyline" begin? Where will it end? What's happening in the present that contributes to connecting that beginning and ending in a straight, coherent line?

Now rewrite each story from the perspective of a different paradigm. If your marriage is in decline, write a story in which it remains just as it is, forever, or evolves to new heights of intimacy, romance and satisfaction. If your job is a repetitious, mind-numbing bore, in your story let it crash and burn, or else be transformed into an exciting challenge. If, spiritually, you seek to convert the world to your views so everyone can live under one set of God-given rules forever, see the world in flames and nobody winning the Culture War, or see yourself evolving beyond any concept of absolute right or wrong or need to control anyone's behavior other than your own. Change the ending of each story, then construct a coherent narrative supporting that ending based on your real-life experiences. You can disregard incidents that were included in your original storyline, and make central things you edited out altogether the first time around, like the times your spouse was kind to you instead of evil, but don't make anything up. Repeat this exercise until you have three complete stories written out for each major area of life – *Religion/Spirit, Romance, Home*, and *Work* – for a total of twelve (or more, if you added elements) stories.

If all of the narratives are self-consistent and are constructed only from real life experiences, and none of the predicted futures have, as yet come to pass, which one is "true?" Why?

In Key Question Community groups, gather to share your life stories. Take turns relating all twelve narratives to one another, investing equal sincerity in each recounting. Tell each story as if it were the one and only truth, then start over, from a new perspective, which becomes the only legitimate interpretation of events. Switch again and again, until all versions of everyone's life story have been told. In large groups, this can take a while,

so break up into subgroups or even pairs, then switch off periodically.

When everyone has had an opportunity to share all twelve versions of their personal life story, mix all the written narratives up on the floor and have everyone select twelve from the pile at random. Repeat the process you just completed, this time, with all sincerity, recounting whatever versions of whatever stories wind up in your stack as if they were your own. Some of them may be yours, by simple luck of the draw. Make no distinction between your own stories and everyone else's. Whatever "slice of life" you find before you, grab a sympathetic ear and *"tell it like it is…"* Don't forget to be a sympathetic ear, as well.

NOTE: One great truth we discover upon awakening into Stage Three Individual Awake awareness is that we are not distinct and separable beings in the way we believed we were while lost in Stages One and Two slumber. Our individual enlightenment liberates us from the limiting constraints of our personal paradigms, but it does not free us from the greater dream of the planet, which remains inescapable until all Humanity awakens together into Stage Four Limitless Frontier consciousness. The anti-meme system presented in this book is, therefore, intentionally couched in the language of the Paradigm of Evolution – not because it is the *"one true meme"* (there is no such animal), but rather because, as Stage One and Two sleepers and Stage Three awakened individuals, functioning wholly outside the context of one or the other of these grand planetary-dreamplexes is simply not an alternative. And of the three available options, only the Paradigm of Evolution offers the possibility of a future that is positively different from the present, and which allows for the active pursuit of that future by individuals and groups.

When, as a species, we eventually reach Stage Four Limitless Frontier consciousness and the communal human dream is dispelled, we will almost certainly find the evolutionary metaphors

that inspired us to break the bonds of meme-enslavement dissipating into nothingness right alongside apparitions of apocalypse and stasis. And that's okay. Like astronauts enabled to escape earth's gravity by the push of a mighty rocket, once free, we should not be troubled by the sight of our spent stages falling away behind us. We will have reached our destination, and arrived there with an awakened group mind capable of appropriately responding to whatever reality we find beyond the boundaries of the dream. The Paradigm of Decline and the Paradigm of Stasis promise no such transition, or even allow for its possibility, so our collective dream-choice is clear. Evolve or perish!

Chapter 14

Key Question #8
WHERE DOES LIFE COME FROM?

According to a pie chart on the adherents.com website, only 16% of global Humanity self-identifies as "non-religious" – atheist, agnostic, secular humanist, or bearing no religious preference whatsoever. Of that number, half consider themselves "theistic," though not necessarily religious, so really only about 8%, or around 520 million people worldwide profess zero belief whatsoever in any supernatural dimension to reality. The remaining six billion of us are mostly Christian (33%), Islamic (21%) and Hindu (14%), with the remainder split between various schools of Buddhism, Chinese traditional religions, indigenous beliefs, Judaism, Sikhism, non-specified "theism," as mentioned above, and a few uncategorized "others." While these major and minor world religions surely disagree on a wide spectrum of theological, ethical and metaphysical propositions, nearly all share some version of one core conviction. Whether accomplished by way of hands-on manufacture (i.e. the Biblical *In the beginning God created…*), direct or circuitous divine parentage, spiritual emanation, the coalescence into the physical realm of self-existing cosmic awareness, or some different but equally willful supernatural mechanism, life on earth, or at the very least, human life, is almost universally considered to be the direct product of an intentional act of "Creation" on the part of

God, gods and/or goddesses, godlike ancestors, angels or other self-aware, divinely powerful supernatural forces acting on, in, through or even in direct violation of the standard processes of Nature as we know it. Even textbook Darwinian evolution by way of natural selection is seen by many who accept its reality to be but a mechanism by which God continually creates and shapes new species.

But is Creationism in any of its cultural variants true? Can better than nine out of every ten people in the whole world believe something and turn out to be wrong?

Since ancient times, most everyone believed the earth was the center of the Universe. Many considered it flat, as well, since the Bible's Old Testament speaks of angels standing at "the four corners of the earth," and spheres don't have corners. Isaac Newton's commonsensical 17th Century cosmology still holds sway over most modern thinking, even though quantum mechanics revealed the Newtonian "clockwork universe" to be a macro-level illusion (a convincing illusion, for sure, but an illusion nonetheless) as early as 1859, though most directly in the early 1900s, in the work of Max Plank, Albert Einstein, Neils Bohr, et al. Illness was customarily attributed to witchcraft, curses, bad luck and divine punishment until the 1860s, when Louis Pasteur proved that microscopic germs are, in fact, the culprits.

So yes, long-cherished, universally-held beliefs can, and, historically, very often do prove to be flat out wrong. But that doesn't necessarily mean that Creationism is one of those beliefs. We have to dig deeper.

Are there other theories, beside Creationism, vying to explain the origin of life on earth?

We have already discussed theories of biological evolution, in which organic molecules present in the primordial ooze of the early earth are believed to have "come to life" – usually, in standard Hollywood treatments of the event, anyway, thanks to a random Frankenstein-like bolt of electricity from the clouds. In

modern laboratories, however, while scientists have successfully reproduced primordial ooze, and have even convinced the raw chemicals to congeal into promising organic compounds, the "leaping into life" part has so far evaded them, no matter how much real or metaphorical "lightning" they feed to the mixture.

But, despite American Culture War posturing, Creationism and Evolution are by no means the only viable propositions competing to explain Life's origin. Here are just a few less publicized theories (there are many more out there) that may be new to you:

Pantheism – The physical Universe is essentially a single large, unified, living organic being, the "body" of the entity whose mind/spirit/soul we identify as God. The Universe is God, and God is the Universe. Rather than being the "building block" creation of any transcendent deity, Life on earth, or anywhere else for that matter, arises by a process more akin to blood flow or cellular regeneration, a natural, microcosmic expression of the organic workings of God's macrocosmic physical and spiritual existence.

Panspermia – Life here began "out there." The chemical and biological processes of life are universal throughout the cosmos, and microscopic spores, bacteria, viruses etc. routinely ride comets, meteorites or other space debris to "infect" or "fertilize," depending on how you look at it, new planets with life. The "garbage theory" of the origin of life, advanced by Thomas Gold in the 1960s, suggests that Panspermia may result from the evolution of organic "bugs," again, bacteria, viruses, etc. left behind by careless ancient extraterrestrial explorers.

Directed Panspermia – In 1973, Nobel Prize winner Francis Crick hypothesized that Life may have been purposefully spread throughout the Universe by an advanced extraterrestrial

civilization. He argued that the best, most effective means of ensuring the seeding of Life on distant, as-yet-undiscovered habitable worlds would be to fire small grains containing DNA in every direction from the Homeworld, and let Nature take its course. Life on earth may well be the result of just such cosmic seeding.

Clay Theory – Simply stated, *Life comes from rock*. Dr. A. Graham Cairns-Smith of the University of Glasgow proposed in 1985 that complex organic molecules may "piggyback" into life by making use of the non-organic self-replication processes of silicate clay crystals. Peggy Rigou of the national Institute of Agronomic Research in Jouy-en-Josas, France, gave a boost to this theory in February, 2006, when she reported that those gene-like replicators, prions, have been observed binding to clay particles and migrating off again when the clay becomes negatively charged.

Self-Emerging Systems – A variety of scientific studies related to Ilya Prigogine's Nobel Prize winning work on non-equilibrium Thermodynamics identify the emergence of Life from inorganic matter as a natural, and even inevitable, result of a fundamental self-organizing principle inherent in all matter. In self-emerging systems, simplicity breeds complexity, which collapses into a new simplicity, which breeds new complexity in a persistent, rhythmic dance responsible, not only for biological Life, but for all organization in the Universe – including cognition, or mind, which appears to be a general property of all systems in Nature, and in no way exclusive to human brains.

Are any of these theories of Life's origin measurably more or less true than Creationism? Than Darwinism? By what criteria might we even begin to reliably judge?

Human beings were billions of years from existing when Life on earth, however it began, actually did so. We may choose in

hopeful hindsight to believe that God created all Life (perhaps even human beings in His/Her own image), that lightning animated the primordial ooze, that the Universe is an organism and Life its inner workings, that accidentally or on purpose, Life traveled here from space, or birthed from rocks, or created itself… But until we invent time machines and travel back to witness Life's emergence on Planet earth for ourselves – or become a true space-faring species and observe, firsthand, Life's nativity on other worlds (or even take an orchestrating role in initiating its spread throughout the Cosmos) – we will, and really can never say with certainty, *it happened thus*. From our simplest creation myths, to our grandest theological systems, to our most excruciatingly complex scientific theories, all present day human notions concerning the origin of Life, however contradictory their details or implications, must always have at least one crucial characteristic in common – *uncertainty*. In lieu of empirical evidence, which we simply do not have and won't likely soon get, the only honest reply we can give to the question *Where does life come from?* is *We just don't know…*

It may turn out that none of our learned or revealed premises amount to anything more than hope driving blind speculation. Or perhaps, in reality, Life is so ubiquitous and efflorescent that it happily emerges by all paths, cheerfully conforming to the will of supernatural beings, grateful to be scattered willy-nilly by its biological progeny, hitching its own ride where their machinations fail, organizing itself where no outside agency conjures to bring it forth. Or perhaps Life's origins lie entirely elsewhere, in processes we, in the brief 150,000 years of our species' terrestrial journey so far, have never, even once, come close to imagining.

Yet, according to adherents.com, nine out of ten people, everywhere on earth, in their identification with the teachings of one or another religious belief system, express at least some degree of certainty regarding the question of Life's origin. The number is probably, in reality, a lot closer to nine and a half out

of ten, or even nine and three quarters, once the atheists and secular humanists who accept the prevailing scientific view and pronounce the question closed are factored in.

This is really a stunning statistic. Nine and three quarters out of every ten human beings – most everyone reading these words necessarily included – feel certain they know something that, at present, can fairly easily be demonstrated to be objectively unknowable. Take a few moments to consider the ramifications of that statement. In just a few pages, we have demonstrated all scientific or religious pronouncements regarding the process by which Life began – if for no other reason than that we simply were not there to observe it – to be, at best, hypotheses based on cultural tradition, wish fulfillment, and/or education (*"That's what they taught me in school…"*). How Life began, and by implication, what Life is, why it exists, the true limits of possibility (if any) for living beings, etc., is among the most mysterious and promising "open questions" confronting Humanity. Yet nearly all of us live as if the issue were satisfactorily decided, once and for all, hundreds or even thousands of years ago. For us, the question is closed. We rarely think of Life's origin as a question at all, and almost never as a true unknown.

And therein lays a crucial distinction. Life's origin is, at present, unknowable. Therefore, all human pretensions to knowledge on the subject are exactly that – *pretensions*. Our most impassioned cultural disputes on the matter are, one and all, debates about belief, and never fact. Perceived scientific or spiritual "facts" (an example of a "spiritual fact" might be Scriptural references cited as inarguable truth) may routinely be brought to bear in support of one belief system or in attack on another, but what is being most fundamentally contested in such Culture War clashes is far less any objective measure of Life's actual unknowable origin than it is the raw politics of who gets to control the greater context of our shared planetary dream.

For he who decides how Life began defines what it means to be human.

How so?

Our speculations regarding when and how Life began profoundly impact our present moment personal and collective lives for the same reason as do our expectations concerning the future destiny of our species and our planet. Beginnings and endings conspire together to define what is possible within the storyline we're dreaming. They set and lock into place the limitations we'll allow to bind us as we draw a straight line between our imagined common past and projected future with our individual lives. Just as belief in an apocalyptic, steady-state, or ascended evolutionary future drives us, in the present, to make choices aimed at bringing these destinies into being, so a sense of certainty concerning the *unknowable past* restricts our present moment choices by defining what sort of creatures we humans are, why we are here, what thoughts, emotions and behaviors are and are not morally acceptable for us, and precisely what labors we ought to be about, moment by moment, over the whole course of our lives.

That's an enormous amount of psychic control stemming from a single unquestioned belief.

If we accept that we are Divinely Created beings, we owe an *a priori* debt to our Creator of, if nothing else, *gratitude* – expressed in the lives of most sincere believers as a desire to understand and, as best we can, fulfill His/Her Divine purpose for having made us in the first place. We seek guidance from the Bible, Koran, Upanishads or contemporary spiritual writings, and allow our identity to be shaped by what we find there. We become Christians, Muslims, Hindus, New Agers etc., and begin, choice by choice, to rework our lives and personalities in conformity with our chosen tradition.

If we believe Life evolved from primordial slime, we may study the elemental processes of Nature and conclude that humans are nothing more than a few dollars worth of chemicals

purposelessly animated by chance mechanical forces. The word "spirituality" loses all effective meaning for us, beyond describing a pervasive and, historically, quite troublesome human delusion.

Any alternative views we embrace set similar psyche-shaping processes into motion, progressively narrowing our sense of self, of Life, of human purpose and possibility until we find ourselves restricted to the definitions and limitations our adopted belief systems prescribe for reality.

However dissimilar the prospective answers around which we allow the vitally open question of Life's origin to close in our minds, we get exactly the same result – a comforting rush of certainty followed by a transformative, and very much to the point here, *externally driven* "reframing" of our understanding and experience of our lives and selves. What we human beings are, why we are here, and what is possible for us as individuals and as a species are reduced within the context of our chosen beliefs to specific known quantities, and we become personally bound by those definitions. Our capacity to experience reality directly is compromised, and our ability to express our full humanity derailed. We settle into the comfort of manageably smaller worlds and forget we ever seriously pondered such "obvious" questions as Life's origin. *Of course God created Life*, we say with casual ease, *It says so right here in the Bible* (or Koran, Upanishads, Torah, et al)…

As described in Part I of this book, these are all characteristic symptoms of memetic predation. That, in pretty much every religion on earth, they also describe the classic conversion experience is another question best left open at this time.

Our individual and collective dreams create an artificial context in which we sort and prioritize our perceptions, so as to create a "small world" illusion of order and control memes use to pacify us. We accept a much-reduced state of consciousness from what is natural for human beings, making our excess psychic energy available for exploitation. On both the personal

and planetary scales, our dreams, and the stupor of sleep in which they are embedded, are most deeply rooted in, and broadly scripted by, our response to this one fundamental question – *Where does Life come from?* Any answer we accept, like a seed planted in fertile soil, sprouts a world entire, a self-contained memetic storyline our lives become destined to serve as it carries us toward its own predestined ends.

Freedom results, not from trading one set of beliefs for another, but from profoundly un-answering the question of origins altogether, reclaiming and celebrating the gaping yaw at the center of all our proud pretensions to knowledge, and excavating the long buried mystery of what, in its most basic sense, *Life is*, how it got here, and what's possible for Humanity and for individual human beings in a present and future unbounded by limitations imposed by any imagined past. Accepting any answer to this core seed-question of the dream ensures our continued personal and planetary enslavement. But when we learn to reject all answers and, instead, live the question, illusions find no soil in which to take root, and we awaken with our feet firmly planted in reality.

KEY QUESTION EXERCISE #8:
The Long, Dark Now of the Soul

Plan to spend twenty-four to seventy-two hours in total isolation. Schedule time off work, arrange care for your children and pets, shuffle appointments on your calendar, until you have created a one, two or three day block of time – the longest period you can manage, but not to exceed 72 hours this first time out – with no obligations whatsoever to the outside world.

If you live alone, a bedroom with its own attached bathroom can be used for this exercise. If you share your home, rent a hotel room for the appropriate number of nights, preferably on an upper floor or other part of the building where street noise will

be minimal or nonexistent. In either circumstance, prepare the room by stockpiling it with sufficient prepared food (no cooking!) to last the length of time you will be in isolation. Use draperies, blankets or other heavy material to thoroughly cover all windows and other external light sources. If you are using a hotel room with a refrigerator, be sure to loosen the bulb so it won't surprise you when you open the door. Tape over small LED/LCD lights on electrical outlets, light switches and smoke or carbon monoxide detectors. Once the exercise begins, use duct tape to seal the cracks all the way around the door – but be sure, before you do so, to hang the DO NOT DISTURB! sign on the outside doorknob! Your goal is to create a space of total, unmitigated darkness, equipped so that nothing short of a true emergency will call you into the light before your scheduled time of reemergence. If you are in your own home or apartment, take a cell phone into the darkness with you, so you can be reached in case of emergency, but don't make conversational telephone calls or initiate other human contact during your seclusion (no ordering pizza, for example). Unplug the wall phone so as not to be disturbed by sales calls or friends. If you are in a hotel room, share contact info with one person assigned to get in touch with you in case of emergency, and leave your cell phone at home.

Remove all clocks. Don't even wear a wristwatch. Arrange for the front desk clerk or your one outside contact to telephone one to two hours before your allotted time has expired, to give you time to ease slowly back into light-world consciousness. Spend an hour or so carefully orienting yourself to the layout of the room, the spacing of the furniture, finding your way from the bed to the bathroom and fridge.

When the time of your isolation begins, seal yourself into the room as described above. Cover the windows, tape the door, etc. Turn off and tape down all light switches, until you are surrounded by nothing but complete and total darkness. From now until your contact person calls you, you may eat, sleep,

bathe, think, meditate, pace, exercise, or jump on the bed as much you please. But you may not:

- Watch TV
- Listen to the radio
- Talk on the telephone
- Listen to music or audiobooks
- Attempt to read or write
- Talk, hum or sing to yourself
- Drink alcoholic beverages or use recreational drugs

What, then, will you do, in total, enveloping darkness, with no outside stimulation whatsoever, for 24 to 72 hours?

Be. Simply be present If, like most Americans, you suffer from serious, long term sleep deprivation, expect to spend 14 or more hours the first day snoozing – which is one reason why longer periods of isolation are preferable, to get that first, inevitable "long, dark nap of the soul" out of the way. Don't berate yourself for "wasting time" sleeping. Falling asleep in and waking up to total darkness, with no mediating clocks or alarms to regiment the process is, in and of itself, a remarkable experience most of us have never had opportunity to sample. Sleep when you are sleepy. Eat when you are hungry. Pee when you have to pee. Buddhist Zazen or Insight meditation, Tai Chi, Yoga, etc. can be beneficial in the sensory-deprived environment of total darkness, but only if you are already a practitioner of these disciplines. If you're not a regular meditator or Yogin, don't pressure yourself to launch a new program for this starter retreat, however "cool" you think these activities might be under such surreal circumstances. Simply do what comes naturally to you within the rules (no TV, etc.), remaining all the while, to the best of your abilities, present in and to your own body and mind.

Don't mistake the word "present" in the sentence above for some vague and meaningless New Age euphemism. Presence, in this sense, means physical, observational awareness. Take a moment right now to perform a minor role play. A friend you love and have not seen in ages is searching for you in a crowded shopping mall or town square. You see and hear him, but he has not, so far, seen you. He is moving frantically through the crowd, asking strangers if they know where to find you, shouting your name over their heads again and again. You catch up with him from behind, spin your friend around, and hold both arms out wide as if to give him a big hug. *"Here I am!"* you shout excitedly over the noise of the crowd. *"I'm here! See? Here I am!"* The feeling of being in your body as you eagerly shout "Here I am!" is *presence* in the sense meant in this exercise. It's a very solid, physical sensation of really inhabiting your body, of being acutely aware of your hands, feet, belly, buttocks, face, hair. *Here I am!* We are rarely this physically aware of our bodies or minds in the course of normal life, but try during this period of retreat from everyday existence to stay as physically present as possible. Don't hypnotize yourself or drift away into any half-awake trance states. *Be here now*.

After ten or twelve hours divorced from light, from environmental clues like ticking clocks, TV schedules, etc., and from the nonstop bombardment of visual and auditory stimulation our minds and bodies are used to absorbing on a daily basis, cracks will appear in your personal reality simulation. The glue holding your meme-dream together will soften. You may feel buoyant, as if you are floating amongst the stars. You may be assailed by fears of being lost or of having invisible walls close in around you. You may sense unnamed presences in the darkness, experience visions, become disoriented, wildly sexual or simply bored beyond tears. Don't take any of these experiences seriously. Don't pursue them as real or significant unto themselves. They are, one and all, symptoms of "meme-slippage." The dream, in the process of dissolving, is fighting

back. Observe its struggle, but don't be lured into the fray, don't buy into any of it, or the process will stop. You'll be ensnared again and likely find yourself running for the sunlight, jabbering on the telephone, or mindlessly channel-surfing with no memory of having turned on the TV. In the face of unusual thoughts, feelings, sensations or even full blown hallucinations, instead of allowing yourself to be distracted, simply *be here now*. Observe. Wait patiently. Embrace the darkness.

Once the psychic struggle dies down, and the dream has slipped into a state of softness and pliability in which you can still be "you" if you actively call to mind your life in the light-world, but trying takes some real effort and feels more than a little bit forced or foreign, let go of your "light self" altogether. Just be soft, borderless, dark. Don't rush the experience. Really take your time with this phase of the exercise. Stay present in this boundless shadow-state until the anxious urge to grasp after the familiarity of your light-world personality at least mostly passes away.

Only now – while you are momentarily beyond the limitations of any meme-driven storylines, free from all coerced beginnings and endings, and released, probably for the very first time in all your life, from the prescribed "purposes" such narratives hand down – is it time to sincerely question:

"Where does Life come from?"

In Key Question Community groups, construct permanent "darkrooms" on safe and private group property for use by members. Everyone should work with this exercise at least once a year, gradually extending the length of time spent exploring "The Long Dark Now of the Soul" until at least the 72 hour timeframe is met by everybody, and longer as individuals desire, up to about a week (in Tibetan Buddhism, darkness retreats often last a month or longer, so don't worry about overdoing it). Group retreats can also be beneficial, but don't fall

into the "church/zendo trap" of thinking you have to have someone speak or teach or lead in order to legitimize the gathering. No matter how many people are in the room, allow no stimuli. Let darkness and silence be the teachers.

If the group wants to invest in sensory deprivation tanks or similar equipment, as made famous by the 1980 William Hurt movie *Altered States*, that would be fine, too, though a high-tech approach to "The Long Dark Now of the Soul" is not better than a simple dark room. Full sensory deprivation can be a fascinating experience unto itself, but it's hard to stay floating in a sealed tank of water long enough for true dream-dissolution to occur. Feel free to follow the high-tech path in addition to the old school exercise described in this chapter, but don't substitute one for the other.

Chapter 15

Key Question #9
IS EARTH THE CENTER OF THE UNIVERSE?

Sometime between the years 127 and 141 CE, Claudius Ptolemy, the most influential Greek astronomer and geographer of his time, published a thirteen volume masterwork, entitled the *Almagest*, the Latin form of the Arabic *al-kitabu-l-mijisti*, "The Great Book," which would rule as the foremost Western cosmological primer for the next 1400 years. Building on the philosophy of Aristotle, the Almagest described the earth as a fixed, stationary sphere sitting at the center of the Universe, with the Sun, the Moon and the five known planets of the time tracing complex circles around it. Ptolemy's stars number around a thousand, and are uniformly embedded in an outermost, crystalline sphere of the Universe that never changes. Beyond that celestial boundary lies Aristotle's godlike "Prime Mover" which, without itself being moved, keeps all the interlocking cosmic spheres and circles turning in their proper courses.

In 1543, Nicolaus Copernicus published *De Revolutionibus Orbium Coelestium* – "On the Revolution of the Heavenly Spheres" – in which he became the first person in history to create a complete and general scientific cosmological system, combining mathematics, physics, and observational astronomy to produce a mostly-accurate working model of planetary motion in which

the Sun takes center stage, demoting the earth to the status of one planet among many concentrically circling its radiant hub.

The Renaissance saw Galileo significantly improve upon the design of the telescope, allowing the discovery that the Moon and planets are worlds much like our own, with mountains, ice caps, craters, clouds, and even, as in the case of Jupiter, whole systems of moons that orbit their planetary hosts just as the earth and all the planets circle the Sun. Johannes Kepler proved that the orbits of the planets trace long ellipses in their circumsolar journeys, and not the perfect circles so central to the aesthetic "interlocking sphere" cosmologies of philosophy and religion.

In 1687, Isaac Newton's *Mathematical Principles of Natural Philosophy*, better known as the *Principia*, demonstrated that the movements of stars, planets and even falling objects right here on earth can be accounted for by the workings of a single force – gravity. Galileo had been the first to note that falling objects pull toward the center of the earth, but Newton showed mathematically how the observed motion of every object in the solar system can be explained by the mutual mechanical push and pull of natural gravitational forces. No supernatural "Prime Mover" is required.

Since Newton, we have discovered that the our Sun is a single star amongst approximately 100 billion that make up the Milky Way Galaxy, a vast conglomeration of suns within which our little solar system makes its home some 30,000 light years from the galaxy's center. At the time of this writing (2006), scientists have discovered 157 planets circling 99 of those stars, and extrapolate based on these observations that the existence of planets in orbit around distant suns is more likely to be a rule than an exception. Worlds much like those making up our own Solar System may number in the hundreds of billions, just in our galaxy alone! Our Milky Way Galaxy is but one of billions, and likely, hundreds of billions of similar galaxies that fill the Universe in every direction. The Universe is 12 to 20 billion years old, while the earth has existed for only 4.5 billion years. For

better than two-thirds of the time a physical universe has existed, the earth was not a part of it. Life on earth began about 3.5 billion years ago, but we humans have only been on the scene, in our earliest forms (*Homo habilis* and *Homo erectus*), for about 2 million years, and in our present form (*Homo sapiens*) for less than 150,000. We are extreme newcomers to a very large, very old, and even, potentially, very crowded, Universe.

It is a sad truth about life in the early 21st Century that the vast majority of human beings now inhabiting Planet Earth share a psychological and spiritual orientation toward reality that has yet to catch up to Galileo, and in all too many cases, to Ptolemy. Sadder still is that this egregious deficit in our ability or willingness to take into account and relate to the Universe as it has been objectively demonstrated to actually be is far less a product of ignorance than it is of simple disinterest on our part. If we live in nations wealthy enough to provide comprehensive compulsory education, we almost certainly encountered the basics of Newtonian cosmology, Darwinian Evolution, Paleontology and the human fossil record etc. in school (we won't even get into the post-Newtonian realm of Relativity, quantum mechanics, superstring theory, supergravity, etc. here). But how many of us live our lives or make choices in the present moment as if we take the picture of reality revealed by these scientific disciplines to be real? The great majority of rich and poor in every country, followers and leaders within every religion, commoners, monarchs, despots, revolutionaries and freely-elected Heads of State alike, everywhere on earth, operate, instead – *even if, intellectually, they know, or should know, better* – as if the earth sits as still as a stone at the unmoving center of Creation.

We fall far behind Ptolemy and Aristotle when, regardless of what we understand intellectually to be true, we live our daily lives as though the *Earth* and the *Universe* were synonymous terms, using expressions like "the world" to mean, not the geological planet we live on, or even the plants and animals and

bugs and human beings sharing earth's biosphere, but rather, simply, what friends, celebrities, governments or corporations are up to, what everybody's talking about, current events, conflicts between nations, what's on TV, our jobs, families, homes – that tiny fraction of human reality that finds its way into our personal meme-dream because it appears to directly impact us or those we care about. What doesn't meet that criterion, we filter out. As our tiny and wondrously life-encrusted pearl of a planet hugs one of a hundred billion suns, in one galaxy among billions spread like slow-spiraling jewels across the vast and ever-expanding ocean of space, we 21st Century humans feel no shame in gazing at our shoes, kicking up dust and muttering, *"The world is so screwed up…"*

What?

It's all about ME, our delusional, meme-rooted personal paradigms assure us. Our meme-driven religions almost universally put Humanity, if no longer at the physical center of Creation, at least spiritually center-stage in the Great Cosmic Drama, seducing us with echoes of our personal fantasies.

"See? Even God thinks it's all about ME... "

Our economies are so constructed that every ounce of our available personal energy – that small part memes leave us to physically operate with each day – must be invested in near-continuous work with our noses to the grindstone, wholly devoted to the tasks of getting and spending, just to keep ourselves and our families fed, clothed and sheltered. In a deeply negative and stressful way, every moment of every day becomes quite pointedly *"all about me."*

"*How much have I got? How much more can I get? I want to win! I can't afford to lose! I'm trying to make a living here! I… I… I… I… "*

Caught between our desperate fear of sinking beneath the economic waves and the enormous ego-flattery of memes, reality is simply not that appealing. The astonishing physical

size and grandeur of the Universe as revealed by science can't compete for our attention. While such a vision of reality might momentarily inspire us or even strike genuine awe into our hearts, in the long run, its implication that there's really nothing special about our species, our planet, or the galactic speck of cosmic realty our world is but a grain of sand within so injures our inflated sense of self-importance that, in order to remain who we think we are – *the all-important, godlike centers of everything* – we reflexively turn away and re-embrace our self-congratulatory, small-world dreams.

That choice carries a heavy price. Here is a short list of celestial resources we could, with present day or very-near-future technologies, apply toward the resolution of the many global challenges facing our species, if only we could find the courage to awaken to and embrace a Cosmic Perspective:

- For every watt of energy humans generate in every kind of power plant on earth, burning oil, coal or natural gas in the process or generating dangerous nuclear waste, 10,000 watts of solar energy falls to the ground, unused, around us. And that's just what hits the surface. Solar collection satellites in geo-stationary orbit around the earth could gather thousands of terawatts of energy annually, one terawatt being one trillion watts. Assuming only 10% efficiency at transporting that energy to earth-based distribution centers, that's still many times predicted global energy needs in the coming decades. Total global energy usage in 2005 was just 15 terawatts. Hundreds of terawatts could be made available on an annual basis, with no pollution, no greenhouse gas emissions, and no hazardous waste.

- The whole Universe is composed of the same elements we find, and make use of – and all too often fight bloody wars over access to – right here on earth. Over 4,000 asteroids, meteors,

comets and other Near-earth Objects have been cataloged in recent years, circling close enough to the earth that mining them for natural resources has become both a realistic and economically attractive possibility. 834 of these NEOs are asteroids with a diameter of approximately 1 kilometer or larger. A single cubic kilometer of a nickel-iron asteroid is estimated to contain seven billion tons of iron, one billion tons of nickel, and sufficient cobalt to fill demand on earth for 3,000 years.

- Comets are composed of mostly frozen water ice which, if harvested, could supply the earth with vast supplies of desperately-needed fresh water. They could also supply future human interplanetary homesteaders with both fresh water for drinking and large quantities of liquid hydrogen and oxygen, two principle ingredients in rocket fuel.

Take a moment to imagine a near-future human civilization in which just these two "baby-steps" – orbital solar energy collection and the mining of Near Earth Objects – have been achieved. When access to limitless, dirt-cheap, non-polluting energy, plentiful fresh water, and, for all practical purposes, unlimited supplies of metals and other building materials for use on earth and in space are added to the equation, how does our view of that list of global challenges facing Humanity with which this book began change? Oil depletion? Good riddance! Global warming? Stopped dead in its tracks, because we're not burning fossil fuels. The total mineral wealth of the main belt asteroids alone is estimated to exceed one hundred billion dollars for every man, woman and child living on earth today, an economic factor sure to profoundly transform the very concepts of war, famine and pestilence, not to mention economics! As for time running out, the clock will have been reset. Earth need no longer be stripped of her precious resources. The human ecological footprint will have reversed its step, not only ceasing to gouge deep furrows into our planet's ability to

support human life in the future, but freed to turn to the restoration of the path, investing ample clean energy, plentiful resources and bountiful wealth into the task of undoing the environmental damage wrought by reckless centuries of human self-indulgence.

Sound like science fiction? It's not. We've had the basic technology required to realize both of these "baby-steps" for decades. With just a little internationally coordinated effort and investment, both steps could be made operational, resulting in a profound transformation of human society, in spectacularly short order. What's missing is the will to try.

Why would that be? Why would we resist pursuing such a promising and practical two-step solution to the very nearly all the woes that plague our beleaguered species?

Let's return to our list of present day global challenges. The one pervasive contemporary human difficulty not resolved by even minor forays into space-based technologies is *ideology* – extremism, terrorism, and militarism, to which list we can add nationalism, racism, sexism, "religionism" and on and on and on, all the sad "isms" that keep our lives, on both the personal and planetary scales, ineffectively churning in continual cycles of conflict and turmoil.

We have reached, once again, the crux of our human dilemma. "Isms" are memes. They are the large and small scale viral memes and memeplexes actively enslaving individual humans and collective Humanity. Their continued existence and propagation depends entirely upon maintaining uninterrupted access to large supplies of the human psychic energy on which they feed. Until we throw off our memetic oppressors, we will remain ensnared by a meme-dream in which the straight-forward solutions to our easily-soluble real world problems appear impossibly complex and impractical. Not because they are so in reality, but because our flawed paradigms identify them that way, for their own benefit, as a means to the end of

keeping us perpetually stymied, impotent, set upon each other in lieu of working toward our own freedom and the fulfillment of our true human potential, and conveniently available for psychic exploitation.

The moment we break the chains of memetic slavery, every other human quandary falls away. Sure, real difficulties await our awakening from the stupor of meme-sleep, but resolutions to those issues, and the real-world "baby," "toddler" and eventual "grown up" steps required to practically implement them in short, effective order, are obvious to an awakened mind.

The price we must pay for this psychic clarity, for freedom from memetic enslavement, and for the power to effectively overcome our global human challenges and move forward toward a new collective vision of the future is *the surrender of our belief in our own godhood*. We must exchange *It's all about ME!* in its personal, familial, cultural, nationalistic, racial, religious, economic, and every other form this memetic "hook" takes in order to snare our swollen egos for energetic exploitation, for the empirical truth of *the Cosmic Perspective.*

We humans are not, in any objective way, special in, or to, the Universe. We do not inhabit the center of the Universe, the center of our galaxy, or even the center of our own little solar system. None of us, personally, inhabits the center of the earth or even of society. Our time is not likely to be the center of human history. The infinite cosmos was not created on our behalf, and nothing that happens on our tiny, life-encrusted pearl of a planet has any bearing whatsoever on the ultimate fate of the vast, starry void. We are not gods, potential gods, or the "Chosen Ones" of anyone's supernatural deity. There is no Cosmic Drama playing out amongst us, and all such religious, philosophical or political schemas are meme-driven delusions leading our species to ruin. The success or failure of human evolution on Planet earth matters not a lick to the larger Universe, or, very likely, to the earth, where no matter what we do to the natural environment in our sleeping ignorance, should

the human story end with our self-destruction, the untiring march of life will almost certainly swiftly replace us with whatever species next arises bearing the qualities best geared toward survival in the environmental aftermath of our demise. The biggest tantrum sleeping Humanity can throw in defiance of our cosmic dethronement, if that's the path we choose to follow, will go unnoticed by 99.99999% of the Universe, and will be forgotten here on earth within a few thousand years – barely a "blip" on the timeline of earth's 4.5 billion years-long geologic calendar so far.

The ultimate fate of Humanity is utterly insignificant to anyone, anywhere – *except to us.*

That's worth repeating – whether we tap the Sun's energy, mine the solar system, restore our earthly environment and spread to the stars, or choose, instead, to simply smother beneath a blanket of self-produced poison matters, objectively, to no one in all the Universe but us.

But what happens to us does matter to us – and rightly so.

Awakening to the Cosmic Perspective frees us to accept responsibility for the real-time direction of our species' destiny, liberated from the wildly egotistical spiritual ballast of believing that everything we do must matter to, pass muster with, or take center-stage in the "Divine Plan" of some invisible cosmic super-deity before we consider it worthy of our precious human time or attention. Embracing the Cosmic Perspective enables us to take into account and relate to the Universe as it actually is, rather than how our inflated egos would prefer it to be, and to stop waiting for God to save us, or even to reveal clear instructions for saving ourselves. The Cosmic Perspective frees us from the chains of all dream-inspired prophecy and "God-given" teleology. It empowers us to choose the next chapter of the human story for ourselves with impunity, dignity, courage and grace. It grants us physical as well as psychological and spiritual entry into the real greater Universe stretching infinitely beyond earth's atmospheric boundaries. It enables us to enter

that realm not as the conquering gods or kings or Cosmic Conquistadors we may once have imagined ourselves to be, but, more appropriately, as the Cosmic Kindergarteners we truly are, nervously releasing our mother's hand as we tentatively surrender, with butterflies in our stomachs and lumps in our throats, to the experience of our first day of school.

Is earth the center of the Universe? Building on the cumulative genius of Aristotle, Ptolemy, Copernicus, Galileo, Kepler, Newton, Einstein, and many, many others along the way, every schoolchild today learns to answer that question "No," at least in words. But, as adults, what response can be read in the language of our lives, our deeds, our priorities and paradigms? When remaining secure in our self-centered dreams and awakening to cosmic reality both come at high cost – *possible extinction VS sure "cosmic dethronement*" – the real question becomes which price can we afford – or not afford – to pay?

KEY QUESTION EXERCISE #9:
At Home in the Cosmos

Everything I have tried to convey in this chapter is explored in greater depth and with far more eloquence by the late Carl Sagan in his 1995 bestseller *Pale Blue Dot: A Vision of the Human Future in Space*, so your first assignment is to acquire a copy of that classic treatise and read it – twice!

Next, gain access to a really good telescope. If you can't afford to purchase one, sign up for a backyard astronomy class at a local university, junior college, science museum, observatory, etc. The goal is to be able to put your physical eye to a real telescopic lens on a regular basis, and to see the Moon, planets and stars for yourself. Reading about space in books, even the oversized coffee-table variety, filled with big color pictures, watching documentaries on TV, or exploring deep space photographs on the Internet won't cut it. When spinning sense

impressions and memes into our personal 3-D life-dreams, our brains process images received via media like TV/computer screens or two-dimensional photographs differently than those directly perceived by our sense organs. What our eyes see firsthand is automatically accepted as real. On impressions reaching us secondarily, we reserve judgment. In the millisecond-speed environment of our internal reality simulations we never get around to actually experiencing them as existing beyond the specific realm of the media rendering them. We may recognize, intellectually, that a given image represents an aspect of reality we could, with effort, verify for ourselves, but most of the time we don't do so, and so the image remains, in our internal reality simulation, just that – a picture in a book, an image on TV, a computer GIF or JPG, two-dimensionally real in that sense only. In order to genuinely and personally experience the Cosmos, earth's place in it, and, by proxy, Humanity's cosmic non-centrality as real, we must touch space with our senses. We must see Saturn's rings, count Jupiter's moons, track the changing Martian seasons for ourselves. We must learn to recognize the Orion Nebula and Andromeda Galaxy by sight as surely as we would a Blue Jay stealing strawberries from our garden or a Cardinal in the branches of a tree. Books, documentaries and Internet image databases can be helpful aids in our quest to understand what we see through the telescopic glass or mirror, but they must not be exchanged for direct observation. Just as a new neighborhood remains strange to us until we explore it, driving its streets, visiting its shops and restaurants, if we wish to feel at home in the Cosmos, we must earn our familiarity by personally exploring the "cosmic neighborhood" for ourselves. This may at first blush seem an over-simple approach, but as surely as the cosmic observations of Copernicus and Galileo redirected human history, so personal, firsthand familiarity with the real Cosmos around us has the power to rewire human brains. Just try it and see what happens!

None of which should be taken to mean, "Don't read science books," or watch TV documentaries or peruse Internet scientific databases. Imbibe them all, in every field of study – astronomy, physics, biology, chemistry, geology, meteorology, as broad a range as you can manage. But resolve to settle as little as possible for mere secondhand knowledge. You probably can't build a backyard particle accelerator, if for no other reason than that they're very, very big, but you can buy a microscope and a children's chemistry set to personally explore the cellular and molecular worlds. You can erect a backyard weather station to take your own readings of rainfall and barometric pressure. You can stalk the flora and fauna of the region where you live with a camera, a notebook and a good field guide. You can collect and learn to identify rocks and fossils, or your area's wild edible and medicinal plants. Let media and personal exploration work together – read first, then look for ways to put your eyes and ears and nose and tongue and skin on real world examples of what you've studied. Study the world around you with all the power of your keenly-tuned senses, then turn to books/TV/the Internet to supplement your understanding.

Whether we are counting craters on the Moon, seasonal rings in a tree trunk, or paramecia flagellating through a drop of pond water, the simple discipline of actively pursuing a personal experience of Nature, in all its many earthly and cosmic dimensions, can transform our lives on every level. For most of us, such a hands-on stance toward physical reality represents a fundamental renegotiation of our relationship with the world around us. With our attention on Nature, which does not change in deference to our whims and dream-delusions, our obsessive concern with those things that do shift and change – our memes, our ideologies, our belief in Humanity's limiting and inescapable earthbound state – weakens, and eventually falls away. Nature does not lie to us, and in the face of such unequivocal truth, our sad ego-fantasies cannot stand.

In Key Question Community groups, advocate for sane, demilitarized governmental and private development of space technology, especially in the areas of orbital solar energy collection and the mining of Near earth Objects. Learn everything you can about these topics, and share what you have learned with the community where you live, with your local, state and federal legislators, with interested business executives, etc. Join and raise money for the many worthy organizations already out there working to make Humanity's future in space a reality, such as the National Space Society, the Space Studies Institute, and the world's largest space interest group, Carl Sagan's own Planetary Society.

Chapter 16

Key Question #10
ARE WE ALONE?

Averaging one generation every twenty years, if we could trace our personal ancestries back a mere 7,500 generations, the bloodline of every human being living on earth today would converge on Ethiopia in the late Pleistocene era, in the loins of just a very few newly-evolved *Homo sapiens* (Latin for "knowing man"). It took millions upon millions of generations of animal life shaped by natural selection to produce our ancient ancestors, *Homo habilis, Homo erectus, Homo heidelbergensis* and *Homo antecessor* – who, themselves, survived disease, starvation, hungry predators, natural disasters and more for perhaps another hundred thousand generations before splitting off into modern Humanity. In our scant 7500 generations since, our human "knowing" has allowed us to invent agriculture, industry, religion and science, to build towering cities, and to devise machines capable of flying in the air and in space, computers that process trillions of calculations every second, and weapons so powerful that their use, in even relatively small numbers, could easily transform our entire planet into a sunless "nuclear winter" graveyard. In only 150,000 years – roughly 1/23,000th of the time Life has been evolving on Planet earth – we have become the first creatures in the history of the world to not only be capable of making the entire globe uninhabitable for

our own and most other terrestrial species, but to be actively and willfully engaged in the process of doing just that, through our unrepentant use of fossil fuels, our pernicious carnivorism, our never-ending pursuit of ever more destructive military hardware. After 3.5 billion years of Life's gradual development, we have, in the comparative blink of an evolutionary eye, through our assault on the natural environment alone, carried most life on earth with us to the edge of an apocalyptic precipice from which we may not have the power to retreat, even should we develop the wisdom to try.

One of the most compelling arguments against the existence of intelligent life on other worlds stems from realistic observation of its development on our own. It's not enough, in the context of this theory, to find planets "out there." You have to find earth-like planets, and more specifically, earth-like planets that have had the same remarkable luck as our own to remain unmolested by major impacts by asteroids and comets for the billions of years required for intelligent life to evolve. On most worlds, it is theorized, animals may arise, but they get wiped out by natural assaults from space, as did earth's dinosaurs, long before creatures exhibiting reflective self-consciousness can develop. On those rare, lucky worlds chance blesses with relative long term stability, any intelligent beings that manage to arise must find a way, within the comparatively brief window of time between the emergence of intelligence and species self-destruction at the hands of technological overwhelm, to either strike a sustainable balance with the natural environment of their home world, or to develop space-faring technology and move out into the Cosmos. Even those that choose "sustainability" at home must eventually colonize space if they desire long term survival, since neither suns nor planets, however well cared for, last forever. If such combinations of luck, wisdom and foresight were common in our 12 to 20 billion year old Universe, much of our galaxy would have long ago been colonized, and we would have detected signals from or encountered the

undeniable artifacts of such advanced civilizations "out there" by now. Since that hasn't happened, so the theory goes, intelligent life on other worlds must not exist.

Despite its suggestive title, this is not a chapter about UFOs, "ancient astronauts," the potential involvement of extraterrestrials in the genesis of the human species, or any similar such 20th Century pop culture memetic space-age icons. This final Key Question concerns, instead, the luck, wisdom and foresight of 21st Century Humanity as we raise our collective vision for the very first time toward the greater physical Universe "out there," as seen through what we can now consciously recognize to be the rapidly closing window of our own evolutionary rise and fall here at home. Whether the theory described in the paragraph above bears any genuine relevance to life on other worlds remains to be seen. But when we turn its speculative lens on ourselves, right here on Earth, the final key to our own personal and planetary awakening is revealed:

Our long term freedom to unlock our personal potential, to achieve spiritual awakening, to transform global culture, and to reclaim the promise of Humanity's ultimate cosmic destiny is wholly dependent on our short term ability– today, tomorrow, in the next few years and decades – to refrain, as a species, from blowing ourselves up, irreversibly poisoning our land, air or water, or otherwise engineering our own physical extinction.

Unless we take individual and collective action today to begin consciously creating a future worthy of our highest potential as human beings, chances are good that we'll unconsciously manifest our lowest potential, instead. If we do not begin making choices and planning actions today based on serious consideration for the long term survival of the human species, odds are that, in at most a few generations, there won't be any *Homo sapiens* left to consider, or to do the considering.

Can we live with that?

In the history of Buddhism, the earliest split into denominational "schools" occurred soon after the Buddha's death. Some followers, labeling their tradition *Theravada* ("venerable teaching") Buddhism, chose to focus on individual enlightenment and personal escape from the "wheel of birth and death" as the goal of the teaching. Others, calling themselves *Mahayana* ("great vehicle") Buddhists, set their sights on the liberation of all sentient beings, choosing to forego complete personal nirvana in exchange for the opportunity to reincarnate again and again as *bodhisattvas*, Dharma teachers dedicated to sharing the tools of enlightenment with every generation, their hopes for individual freedom sublimated to the achievement of final liberation for all.

Minus the sentimental memetic padding surrounding the bodhisattva ideal, the system described in this book is strongly Mahayanist in its recognition that, while we each can surely, by our own efforts, reach a Stage Three: Individual Awake level of functioning and progress a long way toward realizing true human freedom, our personal awakening cannot be made complete or permanent until all Humanity awakens, the collective dream is dispelled, and we cross over, as a species, into Stage Four: Limitless Frontier group consciousness. What I add to the bodhisattva model is the distinctly unsentimental notion of a ticking *"survival of intelligent species clock."* We may very well manage to physically destroy ourselves before achieving a Stage Four level of awareness, in which case we all die, Stage Three awakened individuals included.

All piecemeal, Us VS Them approaches to our current global ills are destined for failure, because they are based on the meme-driven illusion that we are separate, autonomous individual "I's," objectively capable of competing against one another, of personally winning while others lose, of stockpiling what's "mine" at the expense of what's "yours," etc. "I" is the central deception around which our individual and collective dreams form, the core misapprehension memes exploit in order to enslave us. All procrastinating *"wait and see…" "let others do it!"*

and *"maybe things aren't as bad as they seem…"* strategies are equally sterile, because the approaching global storm of social and environmental consequences of past human activity is not hypothetical. Thrashing violently and carelessly in our self-centered, meme-induced sleep, we have ignited a real-world fire that only an enlightened collective Humanity can extinguish. Should we fail to awaken together, we will surely die as one, dreaming to the end that no inferno surrounds us. Or that it's somebody else's problem. Or that the dream-cavalry – *Cosmic Christs, Final Buddhas, world messiahs, extraterrestrial rescuers, legions of angels*, etc. – are bound to ride over the hill at any moment and whisk us away, just in the nick time.

Are we alone in the Universe?

It won't matter if the only mark we leave on cosmic history turns out to be a footnote in the chapter on extinct civilizations. If intelligent life exists beyond the earth, will ETs scanning our little solar system 150,000 years from today find only a string of lifeless rocks hurtling silently around a minor star? Or will they discover signs of a vibrant cosmic human civilization emanating from every solar planet and coursing through the ethers from ubiquitous interstellar earth colonies?

This is the ultimate choice before us. The *"survival of intelligent species clock"* reminds us that the temporal paths to each of these starkly contrasting futures are by no means of equal length. It may well take seven, seventy, seven hundred, or even 7500 generations to firmly establish Humanity among the stars, and to claim our full measure of cosmic immortality by way of human colonization of space. But, following our present sleeping, meme-controlled course, we stand poised to reach the opposite goal – *extinction by way of humanly-engineered warfare, famine, disease and environmental degradation* – within the lifetime of every individual reading these words, or, in the very best case scenario, in the lives of our children or grandchildren. If we fail to significantly alter our behavior toward each other and toward Nature, globally and soon, there won't be a seventh generation,

let alone a seventieth or beyond. Our individual achievement of Stage Three awakening, however personally gratifying, will have been for naught if our species dies in its sleep.

For an awakened, Stage Four: Limitless Frontier Humanity, on the other hand, the very nature of the question *"Are we alone?"* changes dramatically.

If it turns out intelligent life abounds in the Universe, collective awakening will have prepared us to meet our cosmic contemporaries face to face, as they truly are, without filtering the experience through the sad Hollywood lenses of memetic fear and hope our present sleeping culture focuses on all things "alien." We'll be free as never before to encounter ourselves as we truly are, as well – an experience likely to be every bit as novel as meeting ET.

If we awaken to find we're the first intelligent species anywhere to have survived the developmental test of technology, we'll at least be well positioned to, ourselves, become the denizens of many worlds, making interstellar loneliness unnecessary for newly emergent civilizations; we can become the "Cosmic Welcome-Wagon" for our galaxy, and eventually, the whole Universe.

If life turns out to be an earthly singularity, wholly unique, by design or by chance, to our own little planet, we'll have heroically saved the one precious source of biological life in all the Cosmos from shortsighted self-destruction. Plus, we'll then have the entire endless, resource-crammed Universe to expand into – what a prize!

We may find intelligent life prevalent "out there," but universally hypnotized, oppressed and exploited by memes or similar viral mind-predators, in which case we could take on the, by that time, well-rehearsed role of psychic/spiritual liberators devoted to awakening all sentient beings everywhere.

Our present high-stakes global predicament is a cumulative consequence of trillions upon trillions of seemingly-minor, myopic everyday choices made by many billions of sleeping,

meme-possessed brains over the course of thousands of years. Building a limitless, spacefaring, awakened human future will require trillions of choices more – the kind of clear and conscious choices that are available only to meme-free minds. Like Buddhist bodhisattvas, we must work simultaneously toward both our own and the world's liberation, recommitting ourselves daily to the unweaving of our personal meme-dreams, then acting boldly in the world to reshape human culture, day by day, in the image of our increasingly awakened vision. As sincere seekers of awakening, we must also be constantly mindful that we simply do not have forever in which to achieve collective transformation. We must boldly pursue personal and planetary awakening without fear or apology, in a spirit of unfettered diligence, passion, dedication and urgency. We must start today, and work without pause or distraction until the transformation is complete.

It's hard to imagine any negative outcome to Humanity's breakthrough to Stage Four Limitless Frontier awakening. The price of continued global sleep is clear. Our path to freedom is well-marked. The clock is ticking.

KEY QUESTION EXERCISE #10:
Become the Change

Look back in your notebook to the five dominant roles you identified as central to your current definition of "I" when you completed the Role Play exercise attached to Key Question #3, *Who Do You Think You Are?* in Chapter Nine. Explore each role at length in writing again, but this time, rather than merely identifying the characters you are already unconsciously playing in life, your task is to consciously redesign the attitudes, values, personal characteristics, etc. each role would exemplify had it evolved in a human society whose most important social priority – *before material success, before maintaining or passing on tradition, before self-aggrandizement of any kind, or even individual*

self-preservation – was assuring the long term physical survival and cultural advancement of the species as a whole. How would fathers or mothers who take responsibility for the quality of life on earth in fifty or a hundred generations raise children today? What parental knowledge might sons or daughters value if tasked to preserve the natural environment for children born a hundred, a thousand or ten thousand years from now? How might teachers teach and students learn when genuinely pleased to feel the intellectual weight of countless future generations balanced on their shoulders? How does the long view impact the love expressed by husbands, wives and lovers? What roles might vanish altogether (victim, oppressor, bully)? What roles, never before imagined, might evolve?

Take as much time as is required to carefully work and re-work each of your dominant roles to your satisfaction, in light of the primary value of taking personal responsibility for the long term survival and cultural prosperity of the entire human species. Become intimate with these ideal characters you are creating. Get to know them well, write stories about them, hold conversations with them in your head. Run your real world, daily challenges, large and small, past them, and test their responses. Adjust your designs accordingly. Flesh out your redesigned roles in as many dimensions as possible (emotional, intellectual, philosophical, moral, etc.), until they feel completely real and natural to you, like characters in a favorite book or movie. When you are satisfied that you have created, within the context of the specific social function each role serves in human culture (*father, mother, son, daughter, teacher, student*, etc…), fully functional, effective personalities capable of preserving and advancing collective Humanity ad infinitum – *step into the roles.*

In working with Chapter Eight's *Role Play* exercise, you have already experienced the illusory, interchangeable, memetic nature of the "I's" currently fulfilling the core social functions of your life. Now, let those go. Drop your old ways of being a father, mother, son, daughter, etc., wholesale, and adopt in their

place the new characteristics you have designed to better fill those functions. Don't worry that you might "lose the real you" or that, in donning your new roles, you are "just acting" or "not being authentic." You were being no more authentic and no less an actor before. The only real difference between the old and new "you" is that your old ways of being in the world were constructed from unconscious, random influences, most often held together by egoistic hopes, fears and self-serving fantasies, while your new ways have been consciously designed from carefully-selected sources, in service to the specific, common human goals of long term physical species survival and continuous cultural renaissance. Further, your new roles *have been designed by you*, so they already naturally reflect what was best about you before, while excluding what was worst.

Mahatma Gandhi is famously quoted to have said, *"Become the change you wish to see in the world."* The social roles you have consciously designed in service to Humanity's brightest potential enduring future *are that change*.

Become them. Change the world.

In Key Question Community Groups, work together to accomplish the same transformation you fashioned for yourselves in the first part of this exercise, only, this time, for your local community. From the perspective of your unique Key Question Community group, what five broad, cultural "I's" most impact the quality of life where you live? Is it the power of specific political offices or parties? Is it governmental or social systems, like the military, welfare, or educational establishments? Is it religion? Science? TV? Art, music, or literature? The power of specific employers, or of corporations in general? The possible influences shaping diverse communities all over the world are far too numerous to even begin to list fully here. But take time, in extended conversation as a group, to whittle the factors in your specific locality down to the five concrete cultural "personalities" your group identifies to be the chief architects of your city, town or neighborhood

identity. Come to a consensus on the five influences your group perceives to have the broadest social impact, the handful of collective "I's" in your community which, if redesigned, would provide the swiftest positive transformation of your local contribution to our common global future. Re-imagine each in the same light as you did your personal life-roles. *How would this political office or party, social institution, broadcast media, form of expression, corporation, church, etc. work if it had evolved to serve all Humanity's long term physical survival and cultural development?* Add to this the secondary exploration, *how would this social "I" function if it were run by enlightened Stage Three individuals devoted to triggering global, Stage Four awakening?*

Redesign each communal "I" just as you did when completing the individual exercise above, investing as much group time and energy as required to successfully re-vision every imaginable aspect of each identified cultural influence, in light of the stated goals. When you are satisfied that you have reshaped your community's five foundational "I's", on paper, into truly visionary institutions capable of serving perpetual human survival and unending cultural progress – *bring them into being*. This is not the same thing as merely protesting against or otherwise working to "bring down" your present community institutions. All such efforts amount to meme-wars that can only bind your group more deeply to the dream. Work, instead, to infiltrate local institutions and creatively transform them from within. Imagine if all the Democrats, Independents and Greens in your community joined the local Republican Party and began advocating for platform changes and moderate candidates, or members of your Key Question Community group won a majority of seats on the local school board, etc. Work to build innovative, new institutions like alternative political parties, churches, arts councils, schools, clubs like the Free Masons, Rotary or Kiwanis, etc. devoted in all their activities to ensuring global Humanity's long term survival and evolutionary success. Just keep in mind at all times that, exactly as was the case with

your individual "I's", neither the old community structures nor the ones you design to replace them are real in any objective sense, so don't get caught up in energy-wasting arguments about who is "right" or "wrong" concerning specific details of belief, values, morality, etc. Being "right" is inconsequential; only effectiveness matters. You have set unambiguous, critical goals, for yourself, your community and your species – are they being achieved?

All social institutions are inescapably memetic, in that they are far less real things unto themselves than they are psychological constructs, ritualized sets of behavioral rules and agreements people consent to be controlled by while in each other's company – and, as always, psychic control = memes. The all-important difference between the old institutions and the new ones you'll create, however, can be seen in their disparate objectives. The old constructs support sleep, self-centered dreaming and the domestication of human minds for convenient exploitation by memes, and because of it, our ultimate physical extinction. Your redesigned institutions will serve the dissolution of the dream, acute awareness of our shared global destiny, and the liberation of individual human minds in service to the ultimate goals of collective escape from meme-slavery, the achievement of Stage Four Limitless Frontier consciousness, and the physical, long term transformation of Humanity into a spacefaring, collectively immortal cosmic species.

That's a huge difference!

It can be argued that, when we work to change the circumstances of the world around us, we are simply seeking to move "dream stuff" from point A to point B, wasting precious psychic energy on efforts to remodel the empty illusion of the dream instead of laboring to awaken from it. It is exactly this notion that gives religions like Buddhism and Taoism their, as a rule, pejorative reputations for "quietism" and "pacifism." Why change anything if it's all a dream, anyway?

I see a clear, twofold distinction on this point:

First, the physical Universe is not an illusion. The earth is physically real. We are real, biological creatures whose physical actions take a physical toll on the real physical world around us. That our minds are deluded, and so we do not understand the profound impact our actions have on the natural world we are a part of is the central reason anti-meme systems are necessary, to awaken the mind. Though our bodies, the earth, and the infinite starry Cosmos may look very different to our newly-opened eyes once mass awakening is achieved, they will all still be there, as will any damage we have inflicted on those systems while tossing and turning in our fevered slumber. All redesigns to our present delusional dream-institutions that can guide Stage One and Two sleepers toward consistently less destructive real-world behavior are good, even if they are themselves equally illusory, even if they only buy Humanity time to work toward achieving the ultimate goal of mass Stage Four awakening.

Time is good; we need all the time we can get.

Secondly, all of our present social structures contain predatory cognitive "hooks," built into them by the memes and memeplexes they serve, that keep us perpetually focused on and embroiled in the dream. They continually drag our attention away from awareness that we are, in fact, asleep and dreaming, and redirect us, instead, toward submersion in ever-deeper levels of psychic somnambulism. By creating social institutions that are free of such memetic "hooks," and which have been consciously constructed to continually remind us that we are sleeping, that awakening is both possible and necessary, and that every moment we are alive is a precious opportunity to work hard toward achieving that goal, we can transform the collective dream itself from a parasitic prison into an engine of enlightenment. By intentionally building alarm clocks into the very substance of the dream, by creating social institutions that make collective awakening, species survival, and global cultural vitality the bedrock justifications for all our actions and interactions, we can reverse on a grand scale the self-centered

value system by which our collective memetic hypnosis has been maintained for millennia.

In skillful hands, the dream itself can be employed to shake off the "hooks" that bind us to the dream.

Part III: Opening

The important thing is this: to be able at any moment to sacrifice what we are for what we could become.

– Charles Du Bos

Epilogue:

A CALL TO ARMS

One decisive factor that has for millennia granted parasitic memes an evolutionary advantage over Humanity, securing their control over our perception and assuring their unconstrained freedom to breed in our minds and feed with impunity on the vast stores of psychic energy that is our natural human birthright, is their great proficiency at misdirecting us into confusing true cognitive, emotional and spiritual freedom with self-serving demands for the liberty to indulge the whims of personality. What we label "personality," that unique, ever-changing, chance constellation of memes and memeplexes inhabiting each of our brains and calling itself "I," *is the parasite*. When we serve its scatological cravings – wallowing in self-pity, being petty or bored, wasting time, chasing empty pleasures, ferociously defending our right to behaviors or beliefs we know to be destructive to ourselves or to others, taking things personally, holding grudges, etc. – we are not being "authentic," "true to ourselves," "genuine" or "free." We are collaborating in our own enslavement. We are aiding and abetting in the theft of the very psychic energy which, in our own hands, would set us truly free, exchanging everything that is genuinely unique and original in ourselves, along with our unimaginable individual and collective potential as human beings, for the spiritual equivalent of a few dollars worth of glass beads and trinkets.

The good news is that the evolutionary advantage can be reclaimed. True freedom can be attained. Stripped of all distracting

memetic religious/spiritual ballast, the bare bones, most direct path to the achievement of personal, cultural and planetary human awakening is remarkably simple:

I. Personal

We must surrender the comforting illusion that the person we are today, the "I" the chance events of our lives have made of us so far, is the best we can do. The full breadth and power of our human potential, as individuals and as members of collective Humanity, is an altogether unknown quantity – though the testimony of human spiritual history suggests that what is possible for all of us may be very great, indeed. We must stop cutting ourselves slack and wallowing in mediocrity, and begin living up to our highest ideals. We must expect and deliver our very best at all times. Who, and even *what*, we human beings are beneath our mask of memes is a genuine mystery. Only by fully opening to that mystery can we take it in and let it change us. We must drop all of our preconceived notions about ourselves, people and reality, and get busy verifying the limits of human possibility – if we can find any. *(This summarizes the first three Keys).*

II. Cultural

If we wish to see the way human beings interact with one another on this planet change, then we must change in very specific ways. First, in order even to begin to understand the true stakes of our present global meme-wars, we must take the time and invest the effort to significantly broaden our knowledge and experience of human cultural diversity. Before we can form any kind of meaningful opinion concerning how we ought to collectively address the challenges facing us as a species, we

must develop a deep, visceral understanding of the sheer number and variety of people we share this tiny planet with, and of what would really be lost if any segment of that number were eliminated. Based on that understanding, we must each decide how we value individual human lives, regardless of what people look like, where they're born, or the (curable) cluster of parasitic memes currently possessing their brains. Only after having made that self-educated choice are we equipped to seriously consider the direction of our common human future. Then we must stop making excuses and hold the bad guys accountable, starting with ourselves, but by no means stopping there. We must consciously conspire together to bring about a worldwide cultural renaissance, beginning with the two most obvious and immediate necessities for human survival – *the end of oil use*, and *universal vegetarianism*. Rather than allowing the societies we are, by happenstance, born into to determine our spiritual possibilities, we must set our own unambiguous spiritual goals, then measure the relative value of our personal, local, national and global human cultures in light of their achievement. *(This summarizes the fourth, fifth and sixth Keys).*

III. Planetary

We must, as individuals and as a species, come to recognize as unreal our hypnotic confinement within memetic "storylines" that determine where we come from and where we are going, and which, by consequence of our belief in their reality, control how we value ourselves, each other, and all our present moment behavioral choices, in service to the "story." Recognizing that the paradigms of Decline, Stasis and Evolution function on the level of the collective human dream, and are therefore never completely escapable for individuals until all Humanity awakens *en masse*, we must work to purge our psyches of *Decline* and *Stasis* memes, and to reshape our shared dream in an

Evolutionary mold. We must center our quest in a clear vision of collective *Stage Four: Limitless Frontier* awakening as an exciting, communal opportunity worth working toward together. We must embrace the unknown past and unwritten future as the exhilarating mysteries they truly are, and accept responsibility for jointly creating a future worthy of a mature, Cosmic Humanity. We must surrender our narcissism, stop waiting for God or anybody's version of a rescuing Messiah to pull our fat out of the fire of the consequences of our own past behavior, and take decisive action in the present to solve a host of immediate planetary problems by using already-available technology to solar-power the earth and mine space. *(This summarizes the seventh, eighth and ninth Keys).*

Key Question #10, *Are We Alone?* plants a ticking time bomb inside the locked box of the collective human dream. Only by opening the box can we defuse it. Exactly when the bomb will explode and kill us all if we are unsuccessful in our efforts, or simply fail to try, is unknown – but it seems prudent to assume that there is not a single moment to waste.

INNER AND OUTER SPACE: THE TWIN FRONTIERS

In past centuries, whenever societies became too restrictive, kings too oppressive, economies too stratified, or religious or political ideologies too stifling, outsiders to the prevailing consensus reality of the day often broke away from the Motherland to brave the hardships of life in wilderness territories, isolation on far away, uncharted continents, etc. They exchanged the safe comforts of social conformity for the uncertain but exhilarating promise of freedom on the frontier. The United States of America is a quintessential example of the coalescence of many such legendary frontier adventures, having

been initially established by colonies of religious pilgrims rebelling against the political and social control of Britons by the Church of England, then peopled over the course of two centuries by wave after wave of immigrant "frontiersmen" from every corner of the world seeking the opportunity to establish lives free of poverty or religious or political persecution in the New World. Many moderns now argue, however, that with more than six billion of us on the planet, and just about every square inch of earthly real estate owned by somebody, populated by many, and technologically "hardwired" via TV, radio and the Internet into a unified "global media control system," there doesn't appear to be any frontier left anywhere in which nonconformists can invest their hopes and energies.

This common contemporary belief that there are no "New Worlds" left to explore is – you guessed it! – a pernicious, untrue, species-controlling meme. It very effectively keeps us locked away inside the dream-box of the grand collective human memeplex, the very box from which we must break free if we hope to survive to experience Stage Four global awakening and evolve beyond our present planet-wide dream of limitation and lack. The "No New Worlds" meme tells us that there is no hope of freedom from the way things are, and so we should settle for the vacuous pleasures of the prison we are in, quietly acquiescing to the slow, psychic vampirism of our common workaday reality as the best we can expect ever to envision or achieve. Ensnared by this meme, to quote American philosopher Henry David Thoreau, *"Most men lead lives of quiet desperation and go to the grave with the song still in them."*

Yet, all the while, just beyond the paper-thin veil of the dream, lie unexplored frontiers of freedom beyond imagining.

We have already discussed the genuine physical frontier of outer space that Humanity must explore if we aspire to avoid extinction here on earth, and to establish anything like a permanent presence in the Cosmos. The sooner we physically open the cosmic frontier, making earthly use of space-based

natural resources, establishing colonies on the Moon and Mars, etc., the easier our mass awakening will become. By physically stepping out into the real, material Universe, even against our meme-controlled, so-called "better judgment," we can experientially put the lie to the illusion of our earthbound station, and inspire the true pioneers in our midst to seek ultimate freedom and new, unlimited definitions of what it means to be human out there amongst the endless sea of stars.

The second genuine frontier before us, and one which is immediately available to every individual reading these words, is that of *inner space*. Inner space is an energetic frontier, an uncharted territory of human possibility that memes separated us from eons ago, when they began siphoning off for their own use the human psychic vitality that by right should have made the furthest, deepest, most unlimited expanses of consciousness our species' natural home. All spiritual paths capable of reliably leading us to the edge of unexplored human inner space and beyond to freedom share two distinct features in common:

- *Their focus is on energy conservation, not energy expenditure,*

and

- *They don't tell anyone what to believe. They provide seekers, instead, with cognitive tools for disassembling the memetic machineries of belief altogether, and for moving beyond to the achievement of a personal, direct encounter with reality as it is.*

Entry into inner space, in which direct knowledge of reality becomes possible, can never be achieved by stressing and straining to breach its borders, or by imitating the gross appearance or behaviors of those we perceive to have crossed over before us. We must direct our labors instead toward fulfilling the long process of identifying and cutting free from the ballast of all the false memetic pseudo-realities now holding

our minds hostage. In this way we liberate sufficient psychic energy that our consciousness eventually returns of its own to its natural state of flight. Then the inner frontier is ours to explore, ultimate psychic freedom ours to experience, and new, unlimited definitions of what it means to be human ours to discover and share with our companions on the path.

Just as our ancestors set off in search of freedom in often hostile, unfamiliar lands, so we must consciously and willfully enter the twin frontiers of uncharted outer and inner space, leaving behind all familiar, limiting definitions of what it means to be human, of what is possible for us, and of meme-driven, often quite ancient and stale earthbound expectations regarding our ultimate human destiny. What we will find beyond the veil of those dethroned beliefs, what reality and Humanity will look like outside the confining wall of limiting lies with which memes have surrounded our psyches since that long-forgotten day when we first invited them into our minds, is an open question. But it will, at long last, be a question that is ours to ask, ours to live, and ours to answer.

IS THIS "ANTI-MEME SYSTEM" ITSELF A MEME?

Is the system described in this book – a self-proclaimed prescription for breaking the power of memes to control our perception, thereby awakening our minds to a direct and enlightened experience of reality – itself, a meme?

The simple answer is *Yes*. Until we awaken, everything in our experience of reality, without exception, is made of, or is at least heavily contaminated by, the illusion-generating activity of memes. That is the unavoidable present human condition in which we all begin our journey to awakening.

But not all memes are created equal. While the path to awakening described in this book necessarily traffics in meme-sullied religious, spiritual, cultural and scientific imagery – *since*

if it did not, it would almost certainly never penetrate the hypnosis of ordinary life and reach anybody's attention – it is not, itself, a religion, a belief system, a social movement, or a science.

An honest definition of this system might be that it is a consciously crafted, anti-parasitic, medicinal "designer-meme" that utilizes the same processes by which memes occlude our minds to untangle the web of illusion that has been woven around our perception, restoring our natural human freedom and psychic vigor in the process. It is a meme purposefully designed to uproot and disable other memes, allowing for the enlightenment of individuals and the eventual transformative awakening of the entire human species.

But, yes, it's meme. Don't let that prejudice your thinking.

When distinguishing the path from the destination in Zen Buddhism, teachers remind students that *"The finger pointing at the Moon is not the Moon"* and equate Zen philosophy and meditation to a thorn one uses to dig out another thorn. Once the embedded barb has been removed, a wise man throws both thorns away, lest he find himself once again hooked by either. The only way to describe the true path to awakening to minds engrossed in life's illusory dream is in memetic dream-language designed to sound the alarm and lead dreamers out of sleep, toward a direct experience of reality as it is.

At which point the path becomes irrelevant. Awakening has been achieved. The challenges facing global Humanity with which this book began have been favorably resolved. Our limitless human birthright has been restored, and our collective cosmic destiny has been reclaimed.

Who can argue with that? Achieve the goal, secure the prize, attain the final destination, and then, by all means, feel free to leave the path and strike off to explore the furthest reaches of the Limitless Frontier in perfect freedom. But until that day arrives, we must start where we are, joining the path to personal and planetary awakening where it begins, at step one:

FREE YOUR MIND

In his famed speech delivered on March 3rd, 1775, American patriot Patrick Henry declared:

Why stand we here idle? What is it that gentlemen wish? What would they have? Is life so dear, or peace so sweet, as to be purchased at the price of chains and slavery? Forbid it, Almighty God! I know not what course others may take; but as for me, give me liberty or give me death!

Liberty or death – that really is the choice facing the human species as the 21st Century dawns on our restless, common planetary nightmare of war, greed, environmental degradation and advancing social and spiritual bewilderment. Thanks to our individual confinement in ego-flattering dream-cocoons that place us dead center in the physical Cosmos and the very Mind and Heart of God – or at least grant us the comfort of that illusory conceit – few of us hear the ticking, and fewer still the call to arms.

Your purchase of this book identifies you as a waking warrior in our collective human struggle for psychic freedom, for physical survival as a species, and for the right, not only to craft our individual and communal futures in the image of our highest ideals and most developed spiritual potential, but to have a future at all. The battle before us is not with other people, no matter what those individuals and groups – especially those we strongly disagree with and self-righteously label "the enemy" – believe, say or do. Rather, our fight is with the memes and memeplexes controlling all human perception on every side of every apparent conflict. If we turn blindly against one another, human against human, we are lost. If we turn away from the battle, we are lost as well. But if we turn toward one another in acknowledgement of our true predict-ament, each of us fighting the good fight to depose our personal meme-possession, while agreeing to stand back to back and shoulder to shoulder with

the whole of our species, everywhere on earth, against a predator so subtle that it has taken us thousands of years even to notice its feeding presence, we gain at least the possibility of victory.

The battle plan is simple – I wake up, and help you wake up. Together we wake up our friends, our neighborhood, our city, state, nation, and eventually, the whole wide world.

Even if, in our present state of sleep, we find it understandably difficult to discern what true cognitive, emotional and spiritual freedom might look like or make possible for Humanity in the long run, we have at least, in just the few pages of this one thin volume, managed to flush our oppressor out of hiding. We've caught a glimpse of its form, its strategies, and of the price of chains and slavery we pay each day to rest quietly in its dream-weaving arms. We understand the stakes, and have come into possession of the knowledge and tools required to unweave the illusion and burst through, one by one, into reality, psychic liberty and, eventually, together, into the *Limitless Frontier* of collective human possibility.

The battle lines are drawn. Why stand we here idle?

Free your mind.

APPENDIX:
MY COSMIC DOWNLOAD

Begun as a freestanding website in 2021. Adding to this book in 2023 so the whole system will be in one place

Chances are you're already familiar with the concept of a "cosmic download" experience. You may have experienced one yourself.

Mine happened in 1988, and over 30 years later is still unfolding. My experience was initially underwhelming in that, while the experience itself "felt" profound and in the near-aftermath radically transformed my life, I consciously retained almost none of the information imparted to me that day.

In 2005, a meaningful chunk of that lost information spontaneously surfaced into consciousness, and I wrote a book, *The Simplest Path to Personal and Planetary Awakening: FREE YOUR MIND,* published under the pseudonym Vincent Casspriano, Jr. I republished *FREE YOUR MIND* as Jack Preston King in 2019.

Early in 2021, that "spontaneous surfacing" process began again when I suddenly found myself compelled to make a series of diagrams. I am not a visual artist of any kind, so I turned to PowerPoint. The images herein are PowerPoint slides saved as jpegs. They're not pretty, but they get the job done.

I hung printouts of the diagrams on my bedroom wall and lived with them for months, refusing to rush into formalizing their meaning in words. I let them "cook," and watched their meanings evolve over time in a process not unlike Roy Neary in the movie *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* carving Devil's Tower in a mound of mashed potatoes.

One day in May 2021 I woke up and "knew" the time had come to interpret the diagrams in writing. The information in this appendix is that interpretation.

I originally labelled *FREE YOUR MIND* "Part One," because I knew even then it was not the whole enchilada and there would be more to follow. But I can see now that this new 2021 "surfacing" really comes first in the revelation and builds the metaphysical groundwork or *FREE YOUR MIND.* So I've labeled this appendix "Part zero" (in my mind) just to shove it out in front, chronologically.

For the record, I "know" this is a "spontaneously surfacing" from my original 1988 download because it has the same "flavor." I recognize the voice. That's not very objective, but objectivity is not my goal. It's really me, writing these words, don't worry. The information in this appendix is not channeled material. But I definitely feel I am *translating* these ideas into my own words, rather than inventing them myself. My goal is to provide an accurate and useful translation of "received information," and not to present these ideas as scientifically testable or objectively "true."

But rest assured, anyone can *experientially* test the validity of these concepts for themselves. You cannot learn these truths by reading them. But you can discover them by taking this emerging spiritual system for a test-drive, looking under the hood, kicking the tires.

If this has been enough introduction for you, feel free to skip ahead and start exploring.

My 1988 Cosmic Download Experience

For those who want to know more about my 1988 cosmic download experience, here's a an excerpt from my FREE ebook *Autobiography of an Earthling: My Funky Spiritual Memoir:*

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It was the summer of 1988. I was working as the manager of a newly-opened store in St. Louis. That was my public life. In my private life, I was at the tail-end of a decade-long quest for spiritual enlightenment that had taken me through the nebulous New Age undergrounds of Castanedan shamanism, Rajneeshian meditation and, for three full years prior to that summer, deep immersion in the Gurdjieff "Work." I had left "The Work," ostensibly, over personal issues – largely my inability to hold my normal life together with all my energy concentrated on esoterica. But looking back, I can see that inability was itself a consequence of having entered a rather unbearable state of hyper-stimulation from three years in that group, a constant, draining agitation that showed no sign of going away, ever. So I did. I bailed, and set out on a new quest for normalcy and a "real life" in the "real world."

I left "The Work" in the spring, so by July, I'd been back in the real world a couple of months. I was pulling an afternoon shift at the store, reading New Age author Paul Williams' *Remember Your Essence* between customers, which were aver-aging about three an hour. It was right at 2:00 PM. I was walking around the store, carrying the book with me, shuffling merchandise around in an attempt to look busy in case the owner decided to drop in unannounced, a nasty habit he practiced regularly.

I have no recollection of what page or passage I was reading when "it" happened, but, standing there, absorbed in the material, I was suddenly "hit" by what I can only describe in terms I've learned since, researching the incident – an "information beam" fired into my head. It was not something I could see, not a light phenomenon, but all at once what seemed like my whole body, my whole being, was literally infused with information, with words and images and geometric patterns that seemed to contain all the knowledge of the universe, passing through me at such speed that none of it was

comprehensible. I was drowning in a sea of knowledge I could not touch, it was rushing through me and right on past too quickly.

Then it was gone. In what I experienced to be about ten minutes. Gone. I most decidedly did not feel "enlightened." The thing was, all that information had shot through me so quickly that I couldn't consciously remember any of it. I stumbled back to the counter grasping mentally after each departing fragment. I found paper and pen, hoping to write some of it down before it was lost to me forever, but as I folded my fingers around the pen the last little bit escaped, and all I managed to get down were two intersecting arcs:

My intention had been to draw intersecting circles, but my hand drew just the arcs and stopped. I stared down at what I recognized as a crude Icthus, the fish symbol you see on the back of a lot of cars, an ancient symbol used by 1st Century Christians to identify themselves secretly to one another during the Roman persecution. My sense was that it had to do with intersecting worlds, intertwining realities, but the details were lost to me in that now fully-dissipated lightning-strike of cosmic knowledge. Whatever it was supposed to mean to me, I didn't get it.

The weirdness continues. As I stood there at the checkout counter, staring down into that cosmic fish at what should have been, by my internal clock, around 2:10 PM, my two evening employees bustled in together from the parking lot. I looked up at them, puzzled. Then I looked at my watch. It was 5:00 PM. Approximately three hours had passed since the experience had begun. In that time, not a single customer had entered the store – a near-impossibility for a big city retail establishment.

I took it as a mystical experience, and a pretty crappy one at that, as it seemed my moment of enlightenment had finally struck and I'd been standing two inches too far to the left. I'd missed all the good stuff.

... Over the years, I have experimented with a variety of explanations for this experience – direct contact with God (or some god-like intelligence – an angel or nature spirit or daemon), possible "alien abduction" (note the "missing time" element), an "information download" from the "Universal Mind," or even a clogged-sewer-like "back-up" of all the esoterica I'd crammed into my head over the last three years sloshing, objectively, right back out of my head, instead of pouring in as I had experienced it subjectively, which is an ego-friendly way of describing an at least minor psychotic break.

What "really" happened to me that summer day back in 1988 is anybody's guess. But in retrospect, I can plainly see that whatever the source of the experience, it effected my life in a remarkable, long-term, two-fold manner:

First, though I was never able to consciously recall any clear details of the information imparted to me that afternoon (except, of course, for the Icthus symbol itself), I'm convinced at least some of it entered my subconscious and, there, took on a life of its own. I found myself powerfully directed into new avenues of thought, action and belief, no longer driven by the philosophies of others (books, teachers, gurus), but by vivid tutelary dreams, gut feelings, an increasingly-reliable *Ziiing* in the presence of "signposts" and turning points I came to call my "Spidey-sense," after the capacity Marvel Comics' famed superhero Spider-Man uses to ferret out truth and circumvent hidden dangers. The process of personal transformation that followed my 1988 "download" unfolded gradually, in baby steps leading very naturally from one experience to the next, from one life-decision and newly-acquired small or large confidence or ability to another, never rushing me in such a way that I might again become obsessed or overwhelmed, but never really

mollycoddling me, either. All the events that followed flowed in a straight line away from the needy confusion that defined my personality "pre-download," toward a state of grounded, centered clarity.

The second, and perhaps the more significant real world effect of my "information beam" experience, especially seen in retrospect, was its directing of my attention to the works of Philip K. Dick, and especially to his novel *VALIS* (an acronym for Vast Active Living Intelligence System), in which he explores, in fictional form, his own real-life "pink beam experience" and its aftermath. *VALIS*, at its core, is a novel about an ordinary, suffering man whose shattered personality is healed through Divine intervention. It's about a deeply caring individual who has foolishly misspent much of his life, and whose personality has been taken to pieces in the process. It's about a turning point experience – the "pink beam" – and the path to integration, wholeness and newfound strength the encounter initiates in the protagonist's life. Much of the novel is pure fiction (and philosophical speculation, especially into Christian, Coptic and Pre-Socratic Gnosticism), but the root events – the misspent life, the initiatory experience, and the reintegration into a wiser, more focused, confident and personally-powerful human being – really happened to Phil, himself.

It happened to me, too. Like a computer antivirus program written to save a system rather than destroy it, the information "downloaded" into my subconscious that day went immediately to work rearranging my life. I was suddenly empowered to kick away the dead wood of bad relationships, to tap new sources of creative inspiration, and aggressively pursue a new and better life. Over the course of the next 18 months, I quit my dead-end job at the store (negotiating a generous severance package on my way out the door), permanently ended my relationship with the Birthday Girl, and enrolled in the writing

program at one of the last truly liberal Liberal Arts colleges in the Midwest...

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This excerpt is about a third of one chapter in my entertaining and enlightening book *Autobiography of an Earthling: My Funky Spiritual Memoir*. It's FREE, so you might as well download a copy on iTunes or Smashword.com and read the full story! Visit jackprestonking.com for details.

PART ONE:

THE BASIC STRICTURE OF EVERYTHING

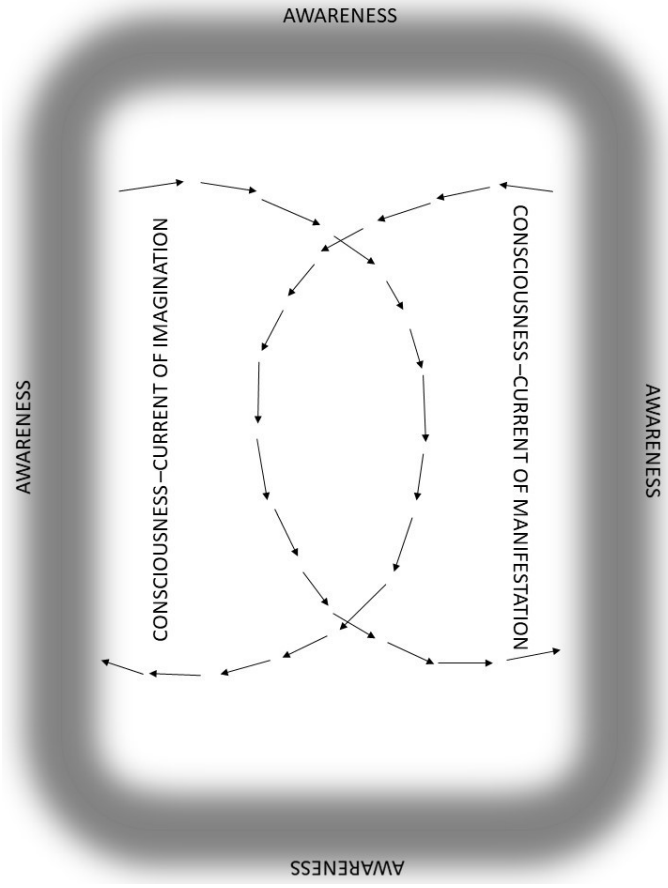
Awareness, Consciousness, Experience, Attention

Awareness

The root of reality is boundless *awareness*. Carlos Castaneda used the metaphor "the dark sea of awareness," referring to the same thing. We can't say that dark sea is infinitely large or infinitely small, because there is only *awareness*, with nothing to compare it to. It's not contained within anything, nor is it outside of anything. *Awareness* just IS. Boundless *awareness* is not aware *of* anything. At the level of the boundless, there is no *of*. There is simply *awareness*, and it is unmoving and unchanging, perfectly and infinitely still.

Consciousness

I don't know *why* this occurred, but at some point boundless *awareness* began to move. The moving dark sea of awareness formed two currents, the *Current of Imagination*, and the *Current of Manifestation* (aka the *Current of Things)*. They flow in opposite directions. They are identical in substance – *awareness in motion*, which we label *consciousness*. The only difference between them is their direction of flow.



Consciousness is *awareness in motion*. More accurately, what we from our human perspective label *consciousness* is not something different or separate from boundless *awareness*. Rather, from where we're located in the basic structure of everything, currents of flowing *awareness* look to us like separate structures (imagination, things), the way waterfalls or tides look to us like separate structures but are really just water in motion. Humans look and see imagination and things, which are flowing *consciousness*, and *consciousness* is *awareness* in motion. These are varying perspectives on the same phenomenon.

At this early stage, from unmoving *awareness* to *awareness in motion*, the *Current of Imagination* is not yet what we think of as human imagination, nor is the *Current of Manifestation* physical reality as we know it, so don't get hung up on words. The currents are just *awareness* in motion, just *consciousness* not yet conscious *of* anything. They aren't *imagination* or *things*. What they are is two currents of *awareness*, now labeled *consciousness* because they are moving, flowing in opposite directions. When at a later stage we perceive those motions from where we're located in the basic structure of everything, they *look to us* like the human experience we call *imagination* and the human experience we call *things*. Our labels describe those currents from our perspective and our experience, like waterfalls or tides. But our labels are not the currents themselves. What we label *consciousness* (imagination, things) is a *behavior of awareness*. *Consciousness* is something *awareness* is doing.

Experience

When the opposite-flowing currents of *Imagination* and *Manifestation* meet, they form a new apparent structure like a

whirlpool. Again, this only appears to be a stable structure from our perspective. From the perspective of boundless *aware-ness*, it's just *awareness* in motion, just something *awareness* is doing.

But from our perspective, the whirlpool of *imagination* and *manifestation* gives rise to *experience*.

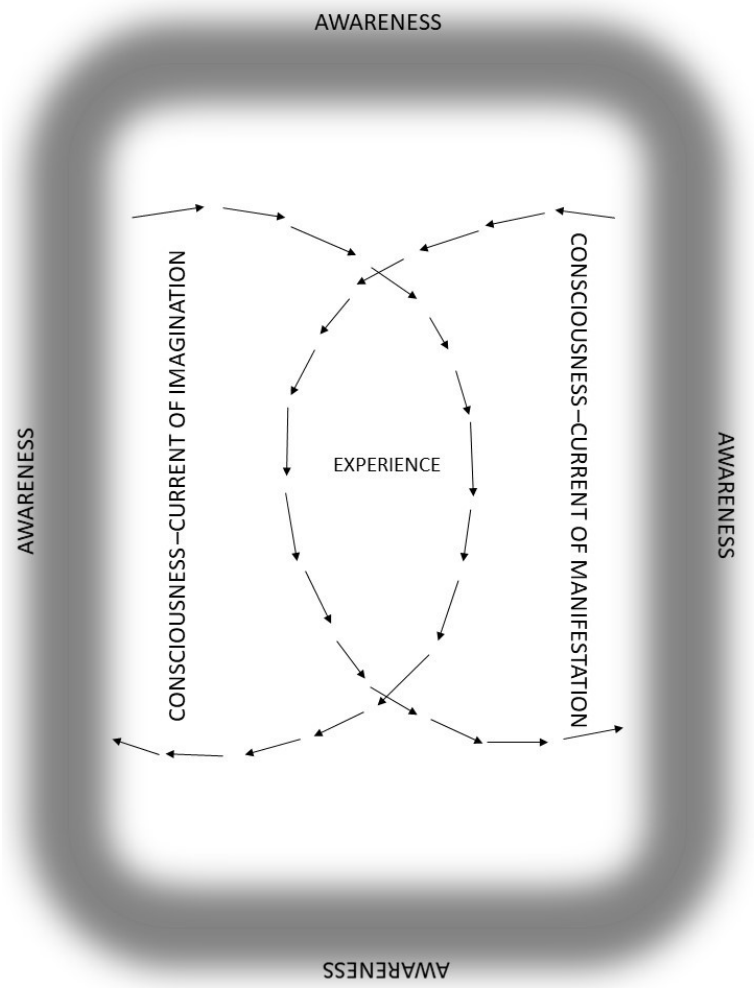
This is counterintuitive. We usually tell ourselves *I am having an experience*, or more specifically, *I am having an experience of that thing over there in the world.* What actually happens is that, when a whirlpool of *experience* forms, the prehuman consciousness-current we're calling imagination and the pre-manifest consciousness-current we label physical reality (things) give rise to *experience*, forming you, things, the world, and the experience of you perceiving things in the world as a single *doing*.

Just because you identify your body as a separate, tangible entity "in the world," and the world of things as a self-existing reality outside of your body, doesn't make it so. It's all one thing. You, the world, and all the things you perceive in the world are a single behavior that *consciousness* is doing, just as *consciousness* is a behavior that *awareness* is doing. There is no separate *you* that is having an experience, no separate *thing* that is being experienced, and no such separate thing as *"the world."* There is only experience.

You, the world, and things in the world are not disconnected, or even intimately interconnected, parts.

There are no parts.

Experience is the seamless whole of *YouWorldThingness*.



Consider a dream. Dreams take place in a dream-world, with a dream-you, surrounded by dream characters, locations and things. But ask:

- Does your dream-you continue to exist tangibly when you're awake, waiting somewhere for you to go to sleep again so he can continue living his life?

- Does your dream-world physically exist somewhere, waiting for your dream-you to enter it like stepping through a door?

- Do your dream characters continue to exist in the dream-world once you're awake?

No, no, and no. Everything about a dream – the dream-world, the dream-you, dream characters, dream things, dream events – are born whole, a single inseparable *doing*. You may identify with the dream-you while the dream is unfolding, but once you're awake it's clear that all the apparently-separate characters, locations and events weren't really separate at all. There's only one thing here, *the dream*. Just because in a dream you identify your dream-body as a separate, tangible entity "in the world," and the dream-world of things as a self-existing reality outside of your dream-body, doesn't make it so.

Just like waking life.

Just as a dream is a whole *experience* that blooms and fades as one – *DreamWorldYouCharactersContentEvents* —so your life, from beginning to end, cradle to grave, waking and sleeping, is a single *experience*, the seamless whole of *YouWorldThingness*.

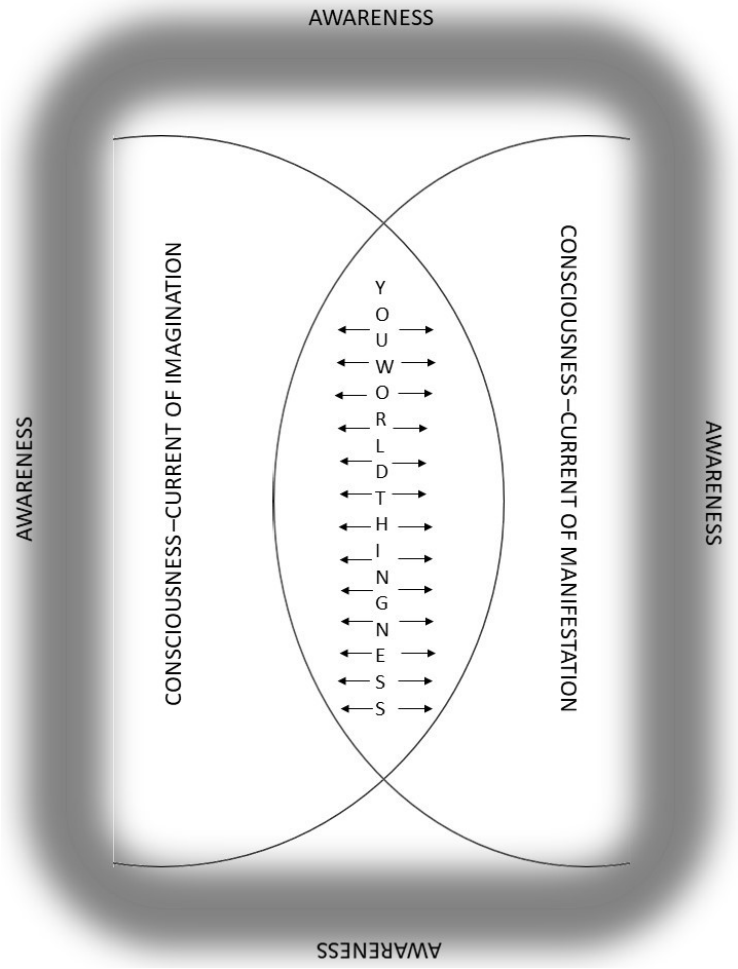
Attention

Attention is a behavior of *consciousness*, which is a behavior of *awareness*. The key is to remember that the root of reality is boundless *awareness*. That's all that really exists. Everything else is something that *awareness* is doing, seen from our human perspective, and labeled by us as if those behaviors were independent things.

We label *awareness* in motion *consciousness*. When the two streams of *consciousness* (*imagination* and *manifestation*) merge, we label it *experience* – *YouWorldThingness*.

Because the currents of imagination and manifestation flow in opposite directions, *YouWorldThingness/experience* whirls.

YouWorldThingness is a spinning whirlpool of manifest imagination, and our never-ceasing whirl exerts a natural force that we label *attention.*



The arrows in the diagram above indicate *attention*. Note the outward direction of the arrows. The whirling pressure of manifest imagination naturally pushes *attention* outward, toward manifestation (in *experience*, toward physical reality), and simultaneously toward imagination (in *experience*, toward imaginal reality). This is the state of a newborn human or a wild animal, in which *attention* flows naturally outward toward physical/imaginal (physimaginal) *experience*.

The Human Predicament

YouWorldThingness

Most animals are born knowing how to survive. Think of insects, fish, turtles, worms, and other creatures that are thrust alone into the world on day one, with no instruction for life at all. Yet they feed, nest, mate, procreate. How is that possible? The term "instinct" only names the phenomenon without explaining it. What is instinct? Where does all the knowledge of an entire species come from? Where is it stored? How does species-level knowledge reach the individual?

The diagram on the previous page explains it. Every manifest thing, from a Higgs Boson, to a molecule, to a blade of grass, to a raccoon, to a person, to a planet, to a galaxy, to the universe is a physimaginal *YouWorldThingness* whirlpool, formed in the interaction of imagination and manifestation.

Everything we are capable of perceiving is physimaginal. In a physimaginal *YouWorldThingness* whirlpool, imagination and manifestation are not separate streams. Their inseparability has become *experience*.

What we label *instinct* –knowledge, memory, habits, images, behaviors, patterns, stories etc. (Archetypes) – is carried by the *Consciousness Current of Imagination*. That is the direction unbound *awareness* flows in that current. What we label *physical* – fields, waves, particles, atoms, molecules, cells, bodies, worlds – is carried by the *Consciousness Current of Manifestation*. That's the direction unbound *awareness* flows in that current. The whole of both currents join to form a whirlpool of *experience*. An inseparable physimaginal *YouWorldThingness*.

Let's say a newly formed *YouWorldThingness* whirlpool is a raccoon. The moment its physimaginal *YouWorldThingness* forms as raccoon *experience*, everything about the raccoon – not just its "racoonness" in an Archetypal/instinctive sense, but everything about this raccoon as a unique individual – is already present. The raccoon's *experience* is not divided into imagination and manifestation, mind and body, self and world. There is only *YouWorldThingness*, and if it were anything other than an undivided whole physimaginal *experience* raccoon, it wouldn't be a raccoon.

Imagination and manifestation are not separate in the *experience* of raccoons (or any other wild animal). In its natural state, depicted in the previous diagram, the whirling pressure of the raccoon's *attention* flows outward from birth to death in unbroken individual *YouWorldThingness*.

As individual expressions of a species, animals have no need for an "inner life" differentiated from an "outer life." They are undivided physimaginal *experience*.

The Attention-Generated Self

Humans don't remain long in their natural state.

A newborn human is just like a newborn raccoon – a newly-formed undivided whole physimaginal *experience* whirlpool of *YouWorldThingness*, with no need for an "inner life" differentiated from an "outer life." Human newborns are undivided physimaginal human *experiences*.

Almost immediately after birth, though, a process begins with no parallel in Nature. This is the one true difference between humans and all other animals.

Humans develop an *attention-generated self*.

A newborn human does not experience itself as a body in a world. It just *experiences* – itself, the mother, the breast, the crib, lights, sounds and smells – all as one *experience*. Babies are born physimaginal *YouWorldThingness experiences*.

Then Mother begins to coo, *"Pretty baby, good baby..."* She touches fingers and toes, massages the baby's body, says her name, *"Elizabeth!"* Every word, every action, every sound, every offering of food references back to the baby as *there*, as individually present, as separate from the mother and from the world.

In such innocence begins the training of the *attention*. Those arrows pointing outward in the diagram above are gradually redirected inward. It takes a few years, but with consistent training the mother, father, siblings, friends, teachers and others in the child's environment turn the natural outward pressure of *attention* inward – or more accurately, toward recreating in the child their own already-trained attachment to separateness, to a self "inside" them that is located in a world "out there."

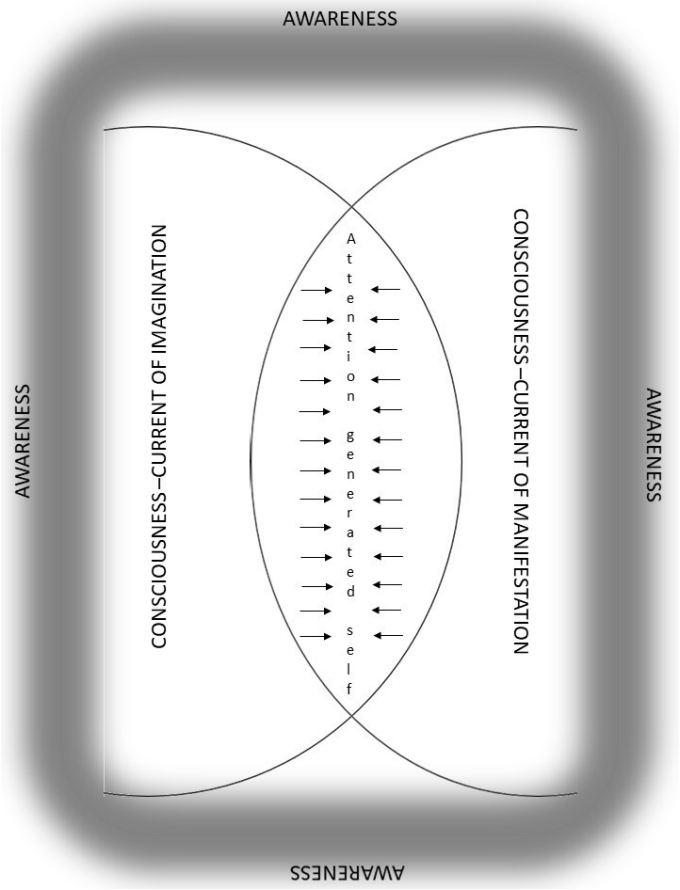
The first and most fundamental shift in the training of *attention* is from physimaginal *experience* to the *experience of "I" in the world*. "I in the world" is the *attention-generated self*.

The formation of the *attention-generated self* divides the child's *experience* into three parts:

1. *A world out there*, in which the child experiences herself to be contained. She no longer experiences the world-as-self, but now focuses her *attention* on *how the world affects her, how the world makes her feel*. Her prime experience is of herself, not of the world.

2. The *attention-generated self*, which must now continuously feed to survive by demanding ever more *attention* be directed to it, expending more and more energy on bending the arrows of *attention* "selfward." It's not enough to simply ask how the world makes her feel. She must now dwell on her feelings, and set standards for how the world *ought* to make her feel, etc.

3. *Imagination*. Now that her *experience* has been unnaturally divided into a physical body contained in a physical world, her innate human knowledge, memory, habits, images, behaviors, patterns, stories etc. (Archetypes) are experienced as emanations from an alien "otherworld" she is instructed by society to disregard. Her family and culture will train her, in early childhood, to label imagination "dreams" and "play," entertaining but not real. By age eight or nine, pretty much all imagination will have been externally redirected into reading, movies and TV, the internet, video games, etc. The only imagination allowed will be passive and escapist. She stops remembering most nighttime dreams – not because they are fewer, but because she has learned they're not important. She stops paying *attention* to them.



A child identified by parents/culture as having an "artistic temperament" may be allowed greater access to imagination, but she will be trained to believe that her art is a product of her *attention-generated self*, and that the purpose of her creative expression "in the world" is to feed the *attention-generated self* – to be "a great artist," an "important artist," a "successful artist." She will be guided to make "artist in the world" a point of identity for the *attention-generated self.* This simultaneously bonds imagination with the *attention-generated self* and pits the two against each other in a competition for energy. Free access

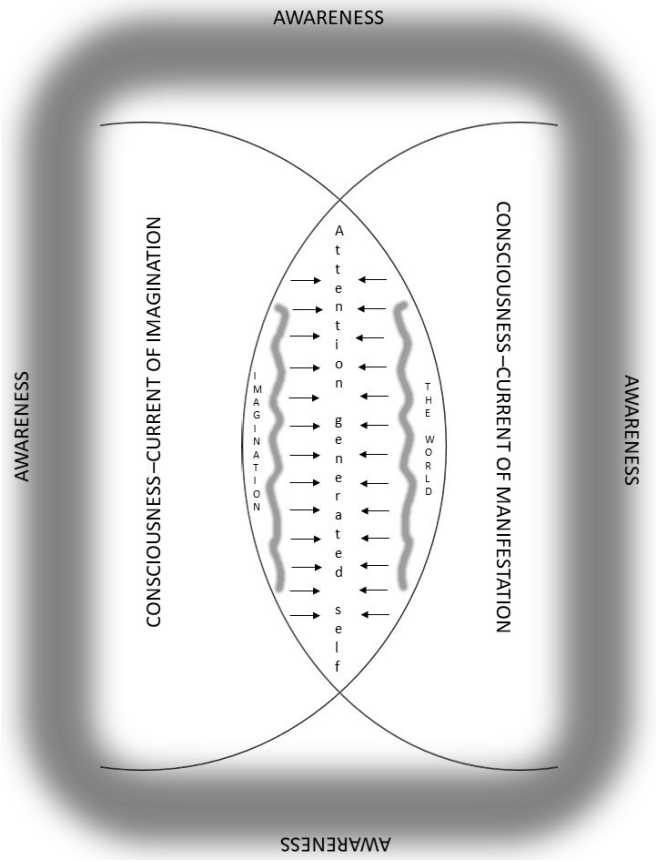
to imagination requires *attention* outflow. Feeding the *attention-generated self* demands *attention* inflow. This tug o' war explains the disproportionate level of mental difficulties among artists.

This section is a bare thumbnail of the *attention-generated self* and the familial/cultural training of *attention*. My 2006 book *The Simplest Path to Personal and Planetary Awakening: FREE YOUR MIND* is an in-depth treatment of that process. That book was my first attempt to explore in writing the information received in my 1988 download experience. I didn't know the term *attention-generated self* at that time, but it will be obvious when you read *FREE YOUR MIND* that the *attention-generated self* is what I'm describing there.

The Veils Between the Worlds

Through a complex and years-long process of enculturation (training of the *attention*) by family, education, religion, social custom, peer pressure, media, etc., almost every child reaches their teen years tyrannically ruled by an unnatural and insatiable *attention-generated self*, and, as a consequence, mostly oblivious to any direct *experience* of either imagination or the world. Her *experience* is obsessively focused on her sense of "I in the world."

The next diagram shows the veils that form as a consequence of the *attention-generated self*. The veils are not directly *generated* by the *attention-generated self*, but are a side effect of its successful bending of the current of *attention*.



Think of these veils as eddies that form due to the unnatural redirection of *attention* toward *the attention-generated self*. They are *experience in motion*, just as *experience* is *consciousness in motion*, and *consciousness* is unbounded *awareness in motion*. Like everything else, the veils are just something *awareness* is doing. But from the perspective of individual human *experience*, they present real obstacles.

With the bulk of our *attention* directed toward our *attention-generated self,* we live a severely limited *experience*. Objectively, we remain undivided whole physimaginal human *experience* whirlpools of *YouWorldThingness*. But once we reach this sorry,

attention-trained state, we are capable of *experiencing* almost nothing of our human fullness.

The Veil of Imagination

By the time we are teens, the veil of imagination might as well be a brick wall. At this stage, there are at best five types of *imagination* still available to us in daily life:

1. Small creative ideas that trickle piecemeal through the veil, only to be snapped up and exploited by the *attention-generated self* to feed its insatiable hunger for *attention*.

2. Daydreams and fantasies that the *attention-generated self* plays with to entertain and aggrandize itself, or pathologically, to worry and distress itself.

3. Culturally-sanctioned, externalized imaginative activities such as reading, watching movies, or playing video games.

4. Nighttime dreams, which the *attention-generated self* commandeers to weave into narratives about itself.

5. Rare spontaneous irruptions of the Archetypal *imagination*.

1-3 above are fairly self-explanatory, but let's go deeper into four and five.

Nighttime Dreams

Everyone dreams four to six times a night on average, yet most adults remember one dream or fewer per week. Many

adults claim not to dream at all, which just shows that they consistently forget them all (though they still dream).

The previous diagram shows why. The crescent labeled *imagination* that is behind the left veil, but still inside *experience,* belongs to our *YouWorldThingness*. We are imaginal repositories of human knowledge, memory, habits, images, behaviors, patterns, stories etc. (Archetypes), and we're always *experience-ing* that on some level. Nothing can change that. But with the bulk of our *attention* bent toward the *attention-generated self*, we have no *attention* free with which to register *imaginal experience*. So we forget. *Imaginal experiences* still occur, but we have no available *attention* with which to grasp and hold them.

When we do remember a dream, it's almost always because during our last dream of the night before waking, that final ungraspable *experience* of the Archetypal repository of *imagination*, some fragment of the *experience* drifts through the veil. Caught in the "selfward" flow of waking *attention*, the *attention-generated self* grabs the fragment, and in an instant twists it into a narrative about itself. The dream we remember becomes a story with us at its center, with the same vain concerns our *attention-generated self* displays when awake. The dream we remember isn't the full *imaginal experience* that was taking place. It's a faint trace of that *experience* spun (like yellow journalism is spun, to manipulate its meaning) toward self-aggrandizement – or self-abasement, which serves the same purpose of putting the *attention-generated self* at center stage.

Note that the veil of imagination is not an obstacle separating two defined areas, *imagination* over here and the *attention-generated self* over there. That's a limitation of trying to show this on a two-dimensional diagram. The real veil separates our *experience of the imaginal* and our *attention* sufficient to claim that *experience* throughout the whole of our *YouWorldThingness*.

By the time we're adults, our *attention-generated self* has so thoroughly monopolized our *attention* that *imagination* doesn't stand a chance. Our dreams lie imprisoned in an otherworld beyond the veil.

Irruptions of the Imagination

Remember that the way you experience yourself as an internal "I" located inside a physical body that is separate from and contained within its physical environment, and with imagination mostly blocked from memory or under strict external control, is not what you really are.

You are not your *attention-generated self*, although once it comes into existence that is indeed a part of you that you have to deal with.

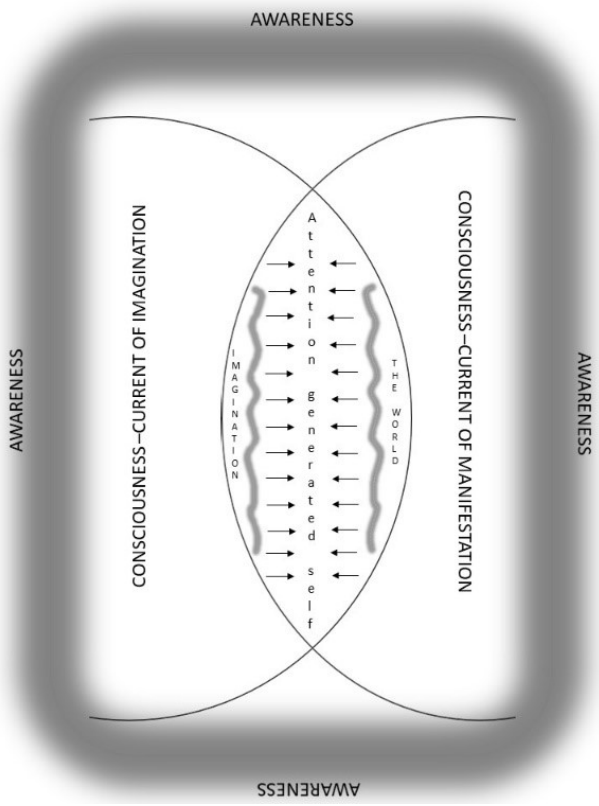
Being domesticated by enculturation can't change what you are. Being divided against yourself hasn't changed what you are.

You are an undivided whole physimaginal *experience* whirlpool of *YouWorldThingness*.

You just forgot. You were trained to forget.

And once or twice in a lifetime, *imagination* may come crashing through the veil to remind you of the *YouWorldThingness* you really are.

The most common way *imagination* crashes the barrier is by way of an Archetypal dream. Let's look again at the diagram with the veils:



The slim crescent of *imagination* that is inside *experience,* but behind the veil, represents your individual allotment of the *Consciousness Current of Imagination*, as uniquely manifested in your physimaginal *YouWorldThingness*. It's compressed and pressurized behind the veil, because you've been trained to actively disregard it, to push it away. It's similar to Jung's concept of the Unconscious. This full allotment of *imagination* not only belongs to you, but *is you*. But you're ignoring it to pay *attention* to the *attention-generated self* instead.

Most of the time, we successfully hold back the pressure. Ordinary dreams act like the rocker on a pressure cooker, letting manageable puffs of dream slip through the veil to be claimed

by the *attention-generated self* for self-aggrandizement. Many people successfully repress *imagination* that way their whole lives.

But it can also happen that the pressure cooker explodes. Compressed *imagination* rushes through the veil and overwhelms the *attention-generated self*. We experience profound, revelatory, life-changing dreams. Spiritual literature is full of examples, and you probably have examples of your own.

There are two types of *Irruption of the Imagination* dreams:

1. Most commonly, dream *experience* is flooded with individual repressed *imagination*. The dream meaningfully reveals the knowledge, memory, habits, images, behaviors, patterns, stories etc. (Archetypes) inhabiting your unique *YouWorldThingness*, usually in symbols that communicate how much more there is to you than just an *attention-generated self*. Think "higher self" or "Holy Guardian Angel."

2. It can also happen that the irruption through the veil obstructing your individual *imagination* is so powerful that it draws impersonal *consciousness* from the greater *Consciousness Current of Imagination* into your individual *YouWorldThingness* and right on past the veil. You are visited by the extra-human *consciousness* beyond the human store of knowledge, memory, habits, images, behaviors, patterns, stories etc. (Archetypes). Your *attention-generated self* could be obliterated in an instant, or utterly transformed, or permanently damaged. You could wake up enlightened or insane, a saint or a madman, depending on how you handle it. This is why spiritual traditions train devotees for long years in a serious practice – to be ready to process this kind of spontaneous irruption if/when it occurs.

Waking Visions

Mystic visions work exactly the same way as *Irruption of the Imagination* dreams, but they occur while you're awake. The flat, two-dimensional diagram above creates a false sense of dualism, with *imagination* over here, and the world over there. That's a limitation of modelling this in 2-D. *YouWorldThingness* is whole. *Imagination* is everywhere, just as *the world* is every-where – one physimaginal *experience*.

"Awake" and "asleep" are arbitrary distinctions. *Imagination* is repressed/suppressed in both states, and so irruption is equally likely in either. The benefit of having an *Irruption of the Imagination* occur while awake is that there's a better chance of remembering it clearly and taking it seriously (i.e., not disregarding it as "just a dream"). Also, if you maintain a spiritual practice and have been training for this moment, you'll likely have better access to those training resources when awake. Otherwise, they're the same phenomenon.

The Veil of the World

Imagination is not alone in being starved for *attention*. Just like the veil of imagination, the veil of the world is an eddy that forms when *attention* is redirected toward the *attention-generated self*, and most of manifest physimaginal *experience* disappears behind it. We stop seeing the world and start seeing *how the world affects us, how the world makes us feel,* what we want from the world or want to avoid in the world. We exchange what the world *is* for what we decide the world *means*. We see what causes us pleasure and fear, and stop seeing what doesn't attract

or repel us. The physical world disappears behind a dulling hypnosis of routine, expectation, and self-concern.

We expect to see what we see every day, and because we expect it, that's what we see. Our *experience* of the world narrows into a reliable, comforting perceptual rut that grants us an illusion of control over life's vicissitudes.

There's a video you can find on the internet of a psychology experiment in which a group of people are tossing balls back and forth between them. Subjects/viewers are asked to pay close attention and count how many times a particular ball changes hands. Halfway through the video, a man in a gorilla suit enters the scene, waves his arms wildly, then exits. The majority, attentively-counting the ball-exchanges, never see the gorilla. When told what they missed, they're incredulous. They can't believe they missed something so obvious!

The ball-exchanges are the daily routines, concerns, self-involvement, and obsessive schemes for attention of the *attention-generated self*. The gorilla is the world. The unseen but effective barrier that makes the gorilla invisible is the veil of the world.

The veil of the world works just like the veil of imagination. By our teens (if not sooner), with all of our *attention* on the *attention-generated self*, we stop seeing the outside world. We see, instead, a pale projection of the concerns of our *attention-generated self –how the world affects us, how the world makes us feel* – and beyond those narrow concerns the *manifest*, like imagination, is effectively an alien "otherworld."

If we ever did see the "outside world" as-it-is, free of *attention-generated self* projections, we would immediately notice that *there is no "outside world."* It only appears "out there" thanks to the veil of the world. Lift the veil and the undivided

WakingWorldYouCharactersContentEvents of *YouWorldThingness* reappears.

Note that the veil of the world is not an obstacle separating two defined areas, *the world* "out there" and the *attention-generated self* "in here." That's a limitation of trying to show this on a two-dimensional diagram. The veil of the world separates our *experience of the manifest* and our *attention* sufficient to claim that *experience* throughout the whole of our *YouWorldThingness*.

The Path to Freedom

There are two independent, though by no means mutually exclusive, paths to liberation from the human predicament. They follow naturally from the basic structure of everything as outlined so far. While each path can be travelled independently to powerful effect, and either one alone provides major improvement over *The Human Predicament,* only through the achievement of both paths can one achieve total freedom.

Path #1:
Reclaiming Attention

The first path to freedom is *reclaiming attention*, the gradual retraining of unnatural inward self-focused *attention* back to its natural outward flow toward the Manifest and the Imaginal, toward *physimaginal experience*.

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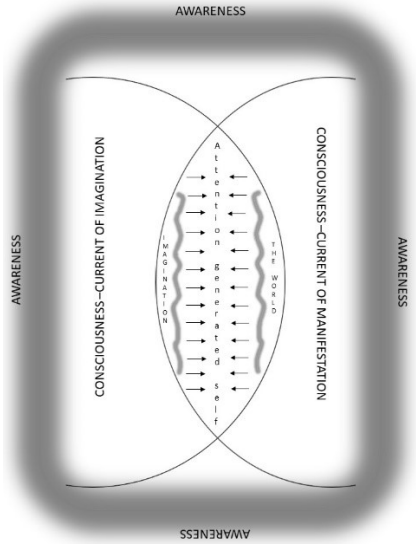
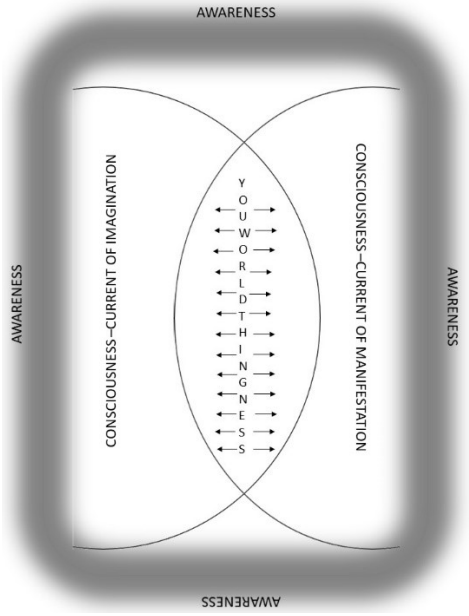


TO THIS:



The *attention-generated self* is not our true self. It is a product of the unnatural redirection of *attention*. We – the real "us" that is our undivided whole physimaginal *YouWorldThingness experience* – did not cause that redirection of *attention*, at least not initially. It was imposed upon us from without, by other people, family, teachers, clergy, media, culture, etc. At a certain point we adopted their habit of redirecting attention and began to identify our *attention-generated self* as the "real me." We focused all of your attention on it and devoted the bulk of our energy to its maintenance and growth. That habit of redirecting *attention* split us into three parts and allowed the veils of Imagination and Manifestation to form. This is *The Human Predicament*.

But if what we desire now is freedom and the restoration of wholeness, to reclaim *YouWorldThingness*, it's important to understand that the *attention-generated self* is not the cause of *The Human Predicament*. It is a consequence of it.

The *attention-generated self* is not our enemy, though in practical terms it has become an obstacle.

The majority of spiritual practices the world over address this problem. They work to disidentify the seeker from ego, to eliminate the craving self, and/or to expand consciousness (in the colloquial meaning) to include the "hidden realms" of the material and imaginal beyond the illusion (behind the veils). However, as I argued in *The Simplest Path to Personal and Planetary Awakening: FREE YOUR MIND*, many/most of those practices were long ago derailed by religious and cultural memes that loop attention right back to ego and feed the *attention-generated self* rather than subduing it.

But *subduing ego* is not the path to awakening. Negative attention to *the attention-generated self* feeds it just as much as positive attention. Whether we're chasing after ego or chasing it away, we're still chasing it. To the extent traditional spiritual

practices focus positively or negatively on ego, memes have coopted their power and those practices should be abandoned.

Practices that successfully awaken us to undivided whole physimaginal *YouWorldThingness experience* make no efforts to quell ego. Instead, they direct attention to the Manifest and Imaginal *without reference to the attention-generated self*. By fully *experiencing* our divided outer and inner worlds with indifference to how ego feels, what it likes or dislikes, or what it thinks it all means, we retrain our *attention* toward *YouWorldThingness*. Pay the Manifest and the Imaginal the *attention* they're due and sooner or later the apparent inner-outer division will be healed and the natural outward flow of undivided whole physimaginal *YouWorldThingness experience* will be restored.

It is not necessary to "kill the ego" or do any kind of violence to the *attention-generated self*. All that's needed is a disciplined retraining of *attention* back to *experience* itself. This reverses what was imposed on us in childhood, and undoes the decades of habit by which we've reinforced that training in adulthood.

When undivided whole physimaginal *YouWorldThingness* is restored, both the *attention-generated self* and the veils of Imagination and Manifestation dissipate as if they were never there. This is a state the world's religions label *enlightenment, awakening, satori, nirvana, Moksha, sainthood, realization, individuation,* etc.

Path #2:
Transformative Stillness

Recall this from the previous section on *attention:*

Attention is a behavior of consciousness, which is a behavior of awareness. The key is to remember that the root of reality is boundless awareness. That's all that really exists. Everything else is something that awareness is doing, seen from our human perspective, and labeled by us as if those behaviors were independent things.

Boundless "unmoving and unchanging, perfectly and infinitely still" *awareness* is what reality *is*.

That can't be changed.

Consciousness, imagination, manifestation, experience, attention, "the world," you, me, and everything else are things *awareness* is *doing*.

Doings change all the time. *Awareness does consciousness* flowing as *imagination* and *manifestation*, that whirl into *experience*, which generates *attention*. When a physimaginal *YouWorld-Thingness experience* whirlpool dies, all of the *doings* that participated in it separate and go on to *do* other things.

Doings are malleable. They not only change regularly of their own accord, one flowing into the other, but we have the power to willfully direct them.

The basic theory behind transformative stillness is straightforward. *Awareness* is "unmoving and unchanging, perfectly and infinitely still." Every *doing* is a motion. When we still that motion, when we stop *doing* the *doings*, they revert to what they are, *awareness*. What only appeared to us to be real reverts to reality as-it-is.

This is *experienced* differently depending on the level of stillness attained, from partial to complete. With partial stillness, one may witness boundless *awareness* and *experience* the unity of all things. With total stillness, one *becomes* boundless *awareness*, in which there are no things. There are many gradients in-between.

The *experience* of *awareness* through transformative stillness is also labeled *enlightenment, awakening, satori, nirvana, Moksha, sainthood, realization, individuation,* etc. in religious/spiritual traditions, though it is not the same thing as reclaiming *attention*.

Reclaiming attention and *transformative stillness* are two different, equally valid paths to freedom *in this life*. Most mystical traditions include both, and rarely distinguish between them.

They are different, though. *Reclaiming attention* and *transformative stillness* are equally valid paths that lead to different destinations within the territory of freedom. Ideally, one will travel both paths simultaneously and arrive fully at both destinations.

Either path alone is a great liberation. But both are necessary to realize the ultimate possibility of human freedom, *Immortality*.

Immortality

One common definition of "immortality" is *eternal life*, but that's not how I'm using the term. I don't know how long a fully realized human continues to exist in the realized state. Maybe forever, and maybe not. "Forever" is a word with very little meaning at this level of attainment.

My narrowly defined use of the word "immortality" for the purposes of this writing refers to *individual survival of physical death*. Which does not happen for most people.

Everything, including us, is something *awareness* is doing, and *awareness* is boundless (which also means not bound by time). Everything is eternal in a general sense, insofar as all *doings* are at root *awareness* and *awareness* is eternal. *Consciousness, imagination, manifestation, experience, attention, "the world,"* you, me, and everything else, however, are *doings*, and *doings* come and go.

Doings have a beginning and an end. *Doings* are born, and *doings* die.

After Life
(not to be confused with "the afterlife")

Every human physimaginal *YouWorldThingness experience* whirlpool dies, and when physical death occurs, there are four possible outcomes:

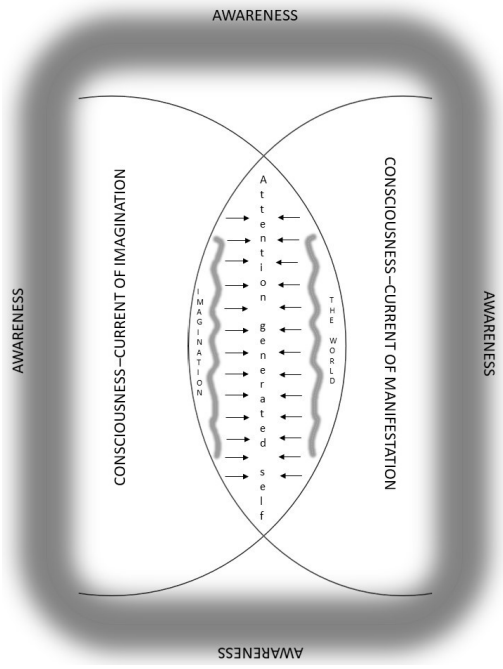
1. Death while trapped in *The Human Predicament* (almost everyone)

2. Death having reclaimed *attention*, but not having attained *transformative stillness*

3. Death having attained *transformative stillness*, but not having reclaimed *attention*.

4. Death having reclaimed *attention* and attained *transformative stillness*

Death While Trapped in the Human Predicament (almost everyone)



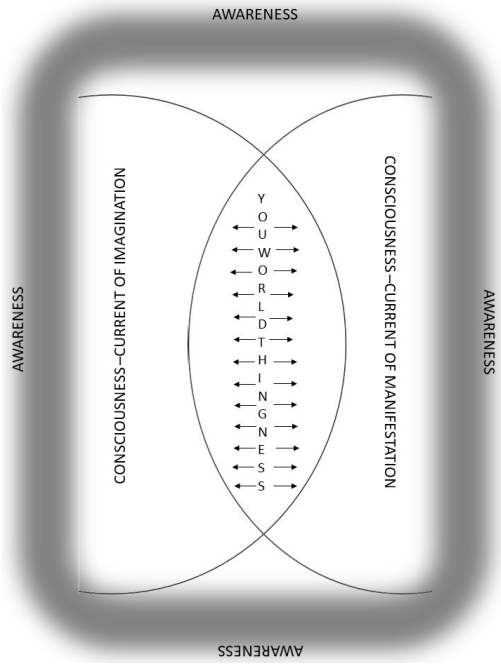
Most of us die with the bulk of our *attention* directed toward our *attention-generated self*, our veils of *imagination* and *manifestation* solidly in place, and having never *experienced* – or even become aware of – our human fullness. That's the *Human Predicament*, of course, but it is also what almost everyone thinks of as "ordinary life." Most of us die just as we've lived.

When a person in this state dies, the *Consciousness Current of Imagination* and the *Consciousness Current of Manifestation* separate and flow off to *do* other things, to participate in new *experience* whirlpools. *Attention* ceases to be generated, and so the *attention-generated self* dissipates into nothing. The veils of *imagination* and *manifestation*, which were always only eddies

caused by misdirected attention, settle and vanish. The imagination and world that were unique to that physimaginal *YouWorldThingness experience* whirlpool are absorbed and flow on with their respective larger currents. Nothing is left that has not now rejoined the currents from which the whirlpool was formed. Yet nothing is lost, since everything the whirlpool was, the currents also were, just seen from a certain perspective.

Every snowflake is unique and when melted is gone forever. But the water cycle continues and what the snowflake was will be a snowflake again. And a thunderstorm. And a gentle spring rain. Same thing here. Nothing but *awareness* lasts, but everything is at root *awareness*, so ultimately nothing is lost.

Death Having Reclaimed Attention, but Not Having Attained Transformative Stillness



When we have reclaimed *attention*, the *attention-generated self* and the veils of *imagination* and *manifestation* no longer vex us. We live in the fullness of physimaginal *YouWorldThingness experience* in a state of living *enlightenment, awakening, satori, nirvana, Moksha, sainthood, realization, individuation,* etc.

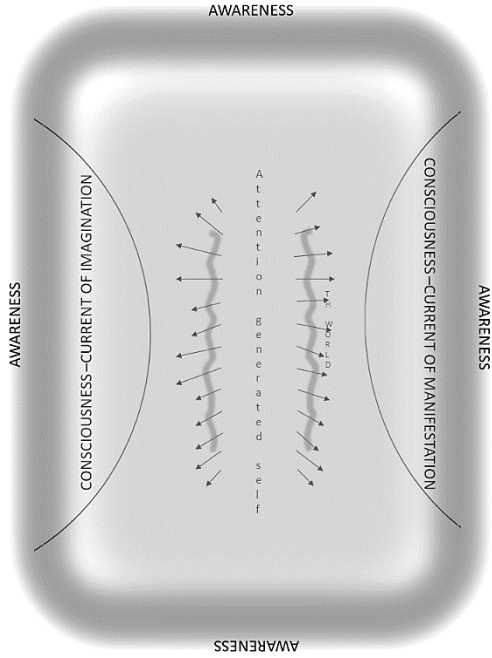
But that won't help us at death. Having achieved in life the fullest authentic *experience* of the unique human whirlpool that we are, at death the *Consciousness Current of Imagination* and the *Consciousness Current of Manifestation* will still separate and flow off to *do* other things. The imagination and world that were unique to our physimaginal *YouWorldThingness experience* whirlpool are still absorbed and flow on with their respective larger currents.

Only boundless "unmoving and unchanging, perfectly and infinitely still" *awareness* is real. A human physimaginal *YouWorldThingness experience* whirlpool is a *doing,* and therefore only appears to be real from our perspective. Fully awake in life to the whirl of *doings* that we are, when those *doings* end in death, so do we.

Death Having Attained *Transformative Stillness*, but Not Having Reclaimed *Attention*

Let's say we have spent years following a daily practice of *transformative stillness* (Zazen meditation, for example). We have witnessed boundless *awareness* and *experienced* the unity of all things. We may even have *become* boundless *awareness*, in which there are no things. More likely we are somewhere in-between.

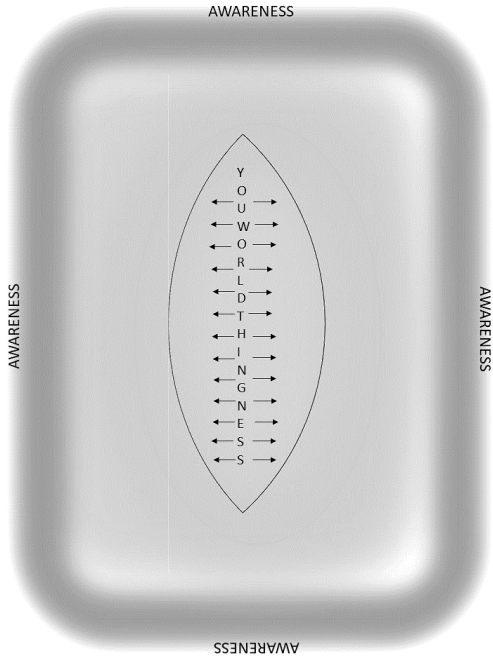
That will not help us at death.



Individual survival of physical death requires two things, "unmoving and unchanging, perfectly and infinitely still" *awareness*, and an individual with sufficient integrity to remain an individual in that state. Even if one has accomplished total stillness and *become* boundless *awareness* while alive (which is rare; most are somewhere along a continuum toward that goal), should we reach death still in the thrall to the *attention-generated self*, the separation at death of the *Consciousness currents of Imagination* and *Manifestation* will rip the *attention-generated self* to shreds. The result is dissipation into the *dark sea of awareness*.

Whatever in us that has *become awareness* in life may go on forever *as awareness* after life, but without having reclaimed *attention* there is no *us* there to distinguish it from the infinite *dark sea of awareness*. We do not hold together. When a drop of water enters the ocean, it remains water but it doesn't stay a drop. It becomes the ocean.

Death Having Reclaimed *Attention* and Attained *Transformative Stillness*



20th Century Russian mystic G. I. Gurdjieff taught that a human being is not born with a soul, but only with a fragile essence and the ability, with effort, to grow a soul to protect it. This is a helpful way to think about this fourth possible outcome at death.

Our undivided whole physimaginal *YouWorldThingness experience* is our true human essence. That's what we really are, and everyone starts out in that fullness at birth. But in the first years of life the sleeping people around us sing our essence to sleep. We fall into the dream of *The Human Condition*, ruled by

the tyranny of the *attention-generated self*. At death, the whole of a sleeping person dissipates back into the scattered *doings* of *awareness.*

Reclaiming attention is the path of reversing the hypnosis of enculturation, dispelling the *attention-generated self*, and fully reinhabiting our lost physimaginal *YouWorldThingness experience* ("awakening essence," in Gurdjieff-speak).

But that's not enough. As we have seen, even an awakened essence dissipates at death without some force or structure capable of maintaining its integrity when the *Consciousness Currents* of *Imagination* and *Manifestation* separate.

The force/structure which can preserve essence beyond physical death is what Gurdjieff called the soul, though there are many other names for it around the world.

Soul is not something anyone is born with. It is, rather, the result of two-step process:

1. *Fully inhabit* physimaginal *YouWorldThingness experience* (awaken essence) by *reclaiming attention*, and

2. "Cook" *YouWorldThingness*/essence in the fire of *transformative stillness*.

When *YouWorldThingness/essence* "cooks" long enough in *transformative stillness* while we are alive, it *becomes awareness* with the integrity to survive physical death, and to launch out onto the *dark seas of awareness* without dissipation.

YouWorldThingness that has *become awareness* is soul. Soul is not a sheath or body that encases and protects essence, but is rather *what YouWorldThingness becomes when exposed at length to transformative stillness*.

A human soul is immortal. And rare.

PART TWO:

SPECULATIONS

The Basic Structure of Everything is my shot at accurately translating the meaning of the set of diagrams I began "receiving" in 2021. I intentionally excluded any "if/then" language because it was my goal to accurately record that "received" information and not to speculate on how that information might apply to situations beyond itself.

This section, *Speculations*, contains a few "if/then" ruminations, after the fact, concerning implications I see in *The Basic Structure of Everything.* These are just me thinking out loud. Each speculation is its own insight. They are freestanding and do not build on one another toward any larger argument.

These are just me thinking aloud.

Speculation One:

We Are the World(s)

Perhaps the most controversial assertion in *The Basic Structure of Everything* is this:

But from our perspective, the whirlpool of imagination and manifestation gives rise to experience.

This is counterintuitive. We usually tell ourselves I am having an experience, or more specifically, I am having an experience of that thing over there in the world. What actually happens is that, when a whirlpool of experience forms, the prehuman consciousness-current we're calling imagination and the pre-manifest consciousness-current we label physical reality (things) give rise to experience, forming you, things, the world, and the experience of you perceiving things in the world as a single doing.

Just because you identify your body as a separate, tangible entity "in the world," and the world of things as a self-existing reality outside of your body, doesn't make it so. It's all one thing. You, the world, and all the things you perceive in the world are a single behavior that consciousness is doing, just as consciousness is a behavior that awareness is doing. There is no separate you that is having an experience, no separate thing that is being experienced, and no such separate thing as "the world." There is only experience.

You, the world, and things in the world are not disconnected, or even intimately interconnected, parts.

There are no parts.

Experience is the seamless whole of YouWorldThingness.

As a consequence of *The Human Predicament*, we experience ourselves to be physical bodies moving through a shared and independently-existing "outside world," with an invisible (to the "outside world") intellectual, emotional, and spiritual "inner life" going on behind our eyes. When *we reclaim attention*, we

discover that we were never located in an "outside world" or had an "inner life." We were all along one essence, the seamless whole of *YouWorldThingness*.

Am I saying that what we currently experience as "the outside world" is actually ourselves? That the sky and earth, nations, buildings, cars, trees and grass and animals, even other people, *ARE US,* our individual essence?

Yes, that's exactly what I'm saying.

But isn't that solipsism? Doesn't that make me/you the only real existing entity, and everyone and everything else tant-amount to dream characters in your personal dream?

No, but it's complicated...

Here's how I tried to get at it in *FREE YOUR MIND*:

Consider my office chair from the point of view of a newborn infant, then a toddler just learning to walk, then a three year old child. To the infant, the "chair" you and I see is not yet even the stick-structure of wood and cloth referenced above, for "stick," "wood" and "cloth" are as yet unknown quantities to its mind. To the toddler, "chair" is an obstacle to crawling, a prop for pulling himself up to a standing position, a place of "Mamma," "lap," "story time," etc. The three year old knows "chair" much as you and I do, perhaps without the subtle nuances of invitation and welcome. A chair is for sitting. He sits.

All the elements that make up the adult understanding of "chair" must be learned by a growing child, one at a time, through studied imitation of the words and behaviors of older humans in the child's environment. These elemental learned concepts are memes. As he acquires more memes, the child's concept of "chair" will expand, and in some ways contract, as well, as when "chair" ceases to be an obstacle to crawling because the child now walks. Like a jigsaw puzzle, he will add, subtract and rearrange the memetic pieces many times, with a remarkable mental dexterity most readily available to us in our formative years, until his conception of "chair" aligns closely enough with that of older children and adults around him that no one notices any glaring discrepancies.

At which point, his perception locks into place. "Chair," as he has come to understand it, becomes, simply, chair, free of quotation marks. It becomes a steady component of his personal reality, a rock-solid, totally convincing illusory mix of external signals and internal memes he will seldom, if ever, be called upon to question again. By the age of five, he will have forgotten all the work involved in acquiring his present conception of "chair," and there will simply be chairs in the world.

…My office chair is an example of an individual meme, with its own separate life and influence, but it is simultaneously a memeplex – an element of our physical/psychic reality mix which, under closer examination, can be subdivided into a variety of smaller memes, much the way compounds are composed of linked molecules, which are, themselves, made up of combinations of atoms, which can be further subdivided into protons, neutrons, electrons, quarks, gluons, all the way down to the spookiest phantom particles of quantum physics. The "chair" meme allows us to identify furniture intended for seating in almost any environment. But the "chair" memeplex is, itself, composed of "sticks" plus "wood" plus "cloth" plus "sit" plus "comfort" plus "welcome" and on and on and on, each of these elements memes in their own right.

Dozens more individual memes are involved in the making of this single object, some of them wholly unique to me or to the person entering my office for a chat. The "chair" I offer a visitor may include, in my personal "chair" memeplex, great feelings of pride and love because, as a small child, I often stood on chairs to help my mother chop vegetables and roll cookie dough on the kitchen counter. The "chair" my visitor accepts may, in his personal "chair" memeplex, include large helpings of fear and frustration, reflecting his mother's long struggle to control her child's natural exuberance with frequent banishings to the dreaded "time out chair." While our adult conceptions of "chair" will likely be sufficiently compatible that we will both, without hesitation, agree that I am offering him a seat and he is accepting, his "chair" and my "chair" are really not the same chair at all.

In exactly the same way, the "me" he has come to speak with is not the "me" I know myself to be, sitting across from him. The "him" I see before me bears little resemblance to how my visitor experiences himself in his own reality simulation. I have entered into his dream, and he has entered into mine.

Back to the question of solipsism.

I suppose it's possible that only one entity is real, and all the rest of us are dream characters. I've heard the concept of God pitched that way.

That doesn't *feel* right to me, though, and this is a document born of visionary experience and my intuitive speculations in its wake. So let's follow intuition.

What *feels right* to me is not particularly "love and light" the way most people want spiritual concepts to be. Sorry.

The hard truth in my opinion is that, while each *physimaginal YouWorldThingness whirlpool* is an individual experiencing essence (every galaxy, every sun, every planet, every person, every raccoon, every blade of grass, every quark), we each star in our own "experience show" and interact with other *physimaginal YourWorldThingness whirlpools* as supporting characters in our "show." Even the people we feel closest to and love the most are Non-Player Characters (to use a gaming term) in our *experience*. That's not a moral failing. It's just how *The Human Predicament* works.

We are each the star of our own *experience.* We are all NPCs in each other's *experience*.

As a consequence of *The Human Predicament*, we experience ourselves to be physical bodies moving through a shared and independently-existing "outside world," with an invisible (to the "outside world") intellectual, emotional, and spiritual "inner life" going on behind our eyes.

But, in reality, *we are our total experience* – and the whole world we experience is us.

Am I saying each one of us is the whole world?

YES!

How is that possible?

Let's revisit *FREE YOUR MIND's* "chair" meme above:

While our adult conceptions of "chair" will likely be sufficiently compatible that we will both, without hesitation, agree that I am offering him a seat and he is accepting, his "chair" and my "chair" are really not the same chair at all.

In exactly the same way, the "me" he has come to speak with is not the "me" I know myself to be, sitting across from him. The "him" I see before me bears little resemblance to how my visitor experiences himself in his own reality simulation. I have entered into his dream, and he has entered into mine.

While trapped in *The Human Predicament*, we are simultaneously dreamers and characters in the dreams of others.

We *do not* live in the same world. We each *are* an individual experiential world.

Yet, thanks to the training of our attention we received starting the day we were born, and the *attention-generated self* which that training created, each of our dreams is sufficiently compatible that we all, without hesitation, agree that there is one "real" self-existing "outside world" that we all share.

The common Human "outside world" is a shared dream in which we each experience ourselves to be reality's one and only point-of-view character, and everyone else to be NPCs playing more or less significant roles in our experience.

Exactly as we would expect from the *attention-generated self.*

But again, that's not a moral failing. It's just how *The Human Predicament* works. Guilt and recriminations serve no purpose.

Instead, wake up.

By *reclaiming attention* we awaken to *essence* in its totality. We awaken to our unique, whole *physimaginal YouWorldThingness*.

We discover *We Are the World(s)!*

Speculations Two:

The Problem with Psychology and Religion

While Western psychology and world religions possess true and valuable knowledge, neither is capable of liberating us from *The Human Predicament*. They're like doctors working to end a plague, but who have mistaken the virus for the patient.

From *The Basic Structure of Everything:*

The attention-generated self is not our true selves. It is a product of the unnatural redirection of attention. We – the real "us" that is our undivided whole physimaginal YouWorldThingness experience – did not cause that redirection of attention, at least not initially. It was imposed upon us from without, by other people, family, teachers, clergy, media, culture, etc. At a certain point we adopted their habit of redirecting attention and began to identify our attention-generated self as the "real me." We focused all of our attention on it and devoted the bulk of our energy to its maintenance and growth. That habit of redirecting attention split us into three parts and allowed the veils of Imagination and Manifestation to form. This is The Human Predicament.

But if what we desire now is freedom and the restoration of wholeness, to reclaim YouWorldThingness, it's important to understand that the attention-generated self is not the cause of The Human Predicament. It is a consequence of it.

The attention-generated self is not our enemy, though in practical terms it has become an obstacle.

Similarly, from *FREE YOUR MIND:*

What we label "personality," that unique, ever-changing, chance constellation of memes and memeplexes inhabiting each of our brains and calling itself "I," is the parasite. When we serve its scatological cravings – wallowing in self-pity, being petty or bored, wasting time, chasing empty pleasures, ferociously defending our right to behaviors

or beliefs we know to be destructive to ourselves or to others, taking things personally, holding grudges, etc. – we are not being "authentic," "true to ourselves," "genuine" or "free." We are collaborating in our own enslavement. We are aiding and abetting in the theft of the very psychic energy which, in our own hands, would set us truly free, exchanging everything that is genuinely unique and original in ourselves, along with our unimaginable individual and collective potential as human beings, for the spiritual equivalent of a few dollars' worth of glass beads and trinkets.

Psychology

The problem with psychology is that its *raison d'être* (literally "reason to be") is to make personalities happy. To help personalities cope with life. To heal personalities injured by trauma. To free personalities plagued by neuroses.

But, paradoxically, personality/the *attention-generated self*, is the source of what ails us.

One cannot transcend *The Human Predicament* by making personality happy. Not because happiness is a bad thing. But because unhappiness is a consequence of being divided against *YouWorldThingness/essence*. The *attention-generated self* is what divides us.

Psychology treats the virus, mistaking it for the patient.

Religion

Religions, on the other hand, for the most part understand *The Human Predicament*.

Consider Jesus' words in John 12:24:

Verily, verily, I say unto you, except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much

fruit. He that loveth his life shall lose it; and he that hateth his life in this world shall keep it unto life eternal.

The corn of wheat is the *attention-generated self*, obsessively focused on its own concerns, sealed away behind the veils of Imagination and The World. It will cease to exist at physical death, and nothing can change that.

The Basic Structure of Everything tells us:

With the bulk of our attention directed toward our attention-generated self, we live a severely limited experience. Objectively, we remain undivided whole physimaginal human experience whirlpools of YouWorldThingness. But once we reach this sorry, attention-trained state, we are capable of experiencing almost nothing of our human fullness.

To love the life of personality is to lose it - that is, to "live a severely limited *experience"* and dissipate at death.

While "hateth" might be strong language, the fact is *reclaiming attention* kills personality while we're still alive. Its death is the only path to *YouWorldThingness*. Only *YouWorldThingness* has any hope of immortality.

The core symbol of Christianity – a limited human God who must die for death to be overcome – couldn't be more clear.

Eastern religions (Buddhism, Hinduism, etc.) have always taught that the price of enlightenment is ego-death.

"Life eternal" only becomes possible when we willfully – and successfully – conspire to murder our own personalities.

I feel confident that at least some religious practitioners *in a monastic setting* do indeed awaken *YouWorldThingness/essence* and achieve immortality. But workaday religious believers praying in the pew or lighting incense on the altar, not so much.

Most (maybe all) everyday religious practitioners, in every religion around the world, ask of religion the very same benefits the nonreligious seek from psychology – that religion might help personalities cope with life, heal personalities injured by sin, tragedy, sorrow, and pain, and free personalities plagued by fear

of self, others, and the world. They ask religion, as others do of psychology, to bring their personalities joy – *to make the attention-generated self happy*.

While religions at their esoteric core understand *The Human Predicament*, the vast majority of exoteric religious practitioners relate to religion as a palliative for personality. Just like psychology.

And one cannot transcend *The Human Predicament* by making personality happy. Not because happiness is a bad thing. But because unhappiness is a consequence of being divided against *YouWorldThingness/essence*.

And the *attention-generated self* is what divides us.

Speculation Three:

Forget Reincarnation, Try Recombination

What's Wrong with Reincarnation?

The problem with reincarnation, at least as it is usually understood in the West (and much of the East, as well), is the belief that *what incarnates,* life after life, is our unique, individual personhood. I Jack Preston King will one day die, and then return with a new body and a new name, but deep down inside I'll be the very same person. It's the same problem with the expectation of going to Heaven or Hell after death. Both reincarnation and receiving one's eternal reward imply the existence of a unique and permanently-existing (immortal) self capable of experiencing either after-death state.

Eternal reward religions tend at least popularly to identify *personality* with that immortal self (or soul), suggesting that the everyday Jack Preston King of this life and his favorite everyday Aunt Tilly of this life will be eternally reunited after death in Heaven. Queue the harps.

Reincarnation religions like Hinduism acknowledge that personality can't be what survives death, as most if not all of the knowledge, beliefs, experience, memories, etc. that make up personality are acquired after birth. There's nothing eternal about them, and so personality can't be eternal, either. But they then go on to posit that everyone has an *Atman*, each person's eternal spiritual sliver of the Godhead, which is, of course, unique and permanently-existing (immortal). Queue the sitars.

Buddhists reject the concepts of soul (eternal reward), Atman (eternal God-self), and permanent self in general. Yet they still preach reincarnation, or at least most practicing religious Buddhists expect to reincarnate somehow. The Buddha himself is said to have remembered over 500 of his own past lives, so reincarnation is not a modern Buddhist fringe belief.

It's all rather incoherent, when you think about it.

I propose an after life (not afterlife) process more coherent than reincarnation – *Recombination*.

Recombination – Manifestation

According to *The Basic Structure of Everything*, here's what happens to almost everyone at death:

When a person in this state dies [Death While Trapped in the Human Predicament], *the Consciousness Current of Imagination and the Consciousness Current of Manifestation separate and flow off to do other things, to participate in new experience whirlpools... The imagination and world that were unique to that physimaginal YouWorldThingness experience whirlpool are absorbed and flow on with their respective larger currents. Nothing is left that has not now rejoined the currents from which the whirlpool was formed. Yet nothing is lost, since everything the whirlpool was, the currents also were, just seen from a certain perspective.*

Every snowflake is unique and when melted is gone forever. But the water cycle continues and what the snowflake was will be a snowflake again. And a thunderstorm. And a gentle spring rain. Same thing here. Nothing but awareness lasts, but everything is at root awareness, so ultimately nothing is lost.

Remember that *consciousness* flows in two directions, *Manifestation* and *Imagination*. They are two currents of the exact same substance. Their only difference is the direction of their flow.

We interpret the movements of the *Consciousness Current of Manifestation* as the physical world. When *"the Consciousness Current of Imagination and the Consciousness Current of Manifestation separate and flow off to do other things, to participate in new experience whirlpools"* that doesn't just mean imagination or mind. It means bodies, too.

If you've ever observed the decay of a dead animal (roadkill, etc.), you know that a body exposed to Nature gets redistributed fairly quickly. Within a few hours of death, insects start the work of consuming it. As they take the animal apart, the smells they expose attract more insects and scavenger animals. I've seen small animals like a dead cat reduced to fur and clean-picked bones in under a week. Fur and bones, which nobody apparently wants to eat, take much longer to fully decompose, though they eventually do as the wind and rain and weather and microscopic creatures reduce them to dirt.

But where did all the flesh and muscle and sinew go? Into thin air? Into nowhere?

Not at all. They became the bodies of the bugs and beasts that consumed them. They were literally redistributed on the molecular level into the bodies of living beings – and through them into their excretions, which soon became food for other creatures, or simply dirt.

Q: How long until all of the flesh and muscle and sinew that made up that dead body are so dissipated that they are gone forever?

A: That will never happen. Popularly stated, the First Law of Thermodynamics tells us that matter and energy cannot be created or destroyed. They can only change form.

That roadkill body will change forms many times as it nourishes bugs, who are consumed by other bugs and birds and beasts, whose poop feeds plants that will be consumed by larger animals, etc., *ad infinitum.*

In the quote that opened this section, I made the same point in reference to the water cycle:

Every snowflake is unique and when melted is gone forever. But the water cycle continues and what the snowflake was will be a snowflake again. And a thunderstorm. And a gentle spring rain.

This is the *Consciousness Current of Manifestation*. It cycles endlessly.

I want you to think about *locality*, too.

In her 1970 song *Woodstock*, Joni Mitchel famously sang, *"We are stardust..."* Well, we are indeed stardust on some grand cosmic scale. But much more directly, we are cycling molecules of water right here on earth in its very recent history, metabolized from the dead flesh and the nutritious poop of the creatures who fertilized the crops our mothers consumed while we were in the womb, and that we've consumed our whole lives since birth.

Our fleshy human bodies – along with the manifest worlds our *YouWorldThingness* whirlpools of experience spin into being, *are local*. Every manifest thing on earth is made of previous manifest things on earth, cycling.

It's easy to visualize how our bodies are made from the people and animals and plants and insects and microscopic beings that came before us. Future people and animals and plants and insects and microscopic beings will be made from us.

This is the local *Consciousness Current of Manifestation*, cycling endlessly.

Recombination – Imagination

So why should the *Consciousness Current of Imagination* be any different? The two currents are of the exact same substance, just moving in opposite directions. It seems reasonable to assume that what is observable regarding the *Consciousness Current of Manifestation* is also true of the *Consciousness Current of Imagination*.

A dead body does not cease to exist. It just disperses into the life around it until it is no longer recognizable. During the course of that dispersal, it profoundly impacts the life with which it

comes into contact. It feeds other bodies. It enriches the soil. It releases gasses into the air (remember those smells that called the scavengers), etc.

And it makes its largest impact *locally*. The bugs that eat the roadkill are effected more directly and to a greater degree by it than are the bugs that eat those bugs, or the birds that eat the second-tier bugs, or the cats that eat the birds.

Just like the body, when a physimaginal *YouWorldThingness* experience whirlpool dies, the *imagination* that participated in it disperses, too. Gradually, like the roadkill. With the greatest impact occurring locally, like a decomposing cat in the woods.

Q: What is a body doing when it disperses after death into Nature?

A: It is rejoining the larger *Consciousness Current of Manifestation*. Being consumed and taken apart and fed to living Nature is what rejoining the *Consciousness Current of Manifestation* looks like from our perspective.

Q: What does it look like when the *imagination* that participated in a physimaginal *YouWorldThingness* experience whirlpool disperses at death?

A: I don't know. But it must be analogous.

I don't want to scare anybody by positing the equivalent of bugs and beasts eating our *imagination* at death, though that certainly could be the case. I genuinely don't know.

But there must be a process of the *Recombination of Imagination*, just as there is an observable process of the *Recombination of Manifestation*.

And, just as regards bodily decomposition, whether that *Recombination of Imagination* process is brutal or blissful, one thing is for sure. It is *natural*.

Recombination as the Natural After Life (not afterlife)

We are physimaginal *YouWorldThingness* experience whirlpools, spun into *experience* when the opposite-flowing *Currents of Imagination* and *Manifestation* meet. When those *Currents* separate at death, what was *Manifest* about our physimaginal *YouWorldThingness* naturally disperses into the *Manifest*, while what was *Imagination* naturally disperses into *Imagination*.

The impact of a dispersing physical body on the life it feeds after death depends on how it lived. Is that body large or small (how many can it feed, and for how long)? Was it fed on healthy foods, or permeated with toxic chemical additives, preservatives and pharmaceuticals? Is it exposed to Nature, or has it been sealed in a coffin to keep Nature out?

The impact of a dispersing *imagination* must also depend on how it lived. While caught up in our individual physimaginal *YouWorldThingness* experience whirlpool, did our *imagination* grow large or close in on itself? Was it fed healthy knowledge, images, ideas, beliefs, emotions, etc. that made it grow large and rich and sweet, or toxic fare that left it shrunken, poor and sour? Is it open to what comes next at death, or will it meet death paralyzed with fear?

This is getting pretty speculative, so I won't overextend the metaphor. But of this we can be sure:

On death, a process begins in which everything that was *Manifest* about our physimaginal *YouWorldThingness* gradually rejoins – *and impacts* – both the *Consciousness Current of Manifestation* and other physimaginal *YouWorldThingness* experience whirlpools near our death process, including new whirlpools forming locally. Everything *Manifest* in our individual *experience* will continue forever to participate in *Manifestation* and the *experience* of present and newly-forming *Imaginally Manifest experiences*.

On death, a process begins in which everything that was *Imagination* about our physimaginal *YouWorldThingness* gradually

rejoins – *and impacts* – both the *Consciousness Current of Imagination* and other physimaginal *YouWorldThingness* experience whirlpools near our death process, including new whirlpools forming locally. All *Imagination* in our individual *experience* will continue forever to participate in *Imagination* and the *experience* of present and newly-forming *Imaginally Manifest experiences*.

Every physimaginal *YouWorldThingness* experience whirlpool is unique and when dead is gone forever. But the *Consciousness Currents of Imagination and Manifestation* cycle endlessly.

There is no individual reincarnation. But every dispersed physimaginal *YouWorldThingness* experience whirlpool participates in other existing and newly-forming physimaginal *YouWorldThingness* experience whirlpools.

Forever.

Every snowflake is unique and when melted is gone forever. But the water cycle continues and what the snowflake was will be a snowflake again. And a thunderstorm. And a gentle spring rain.

The Ethics of Impact

How we live while our physimaginal *YouWorldThingness* experience whirlpools holds together determines the impact we'll make on the greater *Consciousness Currents of Imagination and Manifestation*, and on future physimaginal *YouWorldThingness* experience whirlpools.

This leads to a very simple ethical standard for living as unique, individual physimaginal *YouWorldThingness* experience whirlpools:

1. Eat healthy foods, and reject toxic chemical additives, preservatives and pharmaceuticals. Treat all manifest things with respect and care. Arrange for our bodies to be as exposed to Nature as possible when we die. Live

bodily so as to be a physical feast for other living things at death.

2. Feed *imagination* healthy knowledge, images, ideas, beliefs, emotions, etc. Grow *imagination* in this life to be large and rich and sweet, and not shrunken, poor and sour. Be curious and excited about life and death. Live so as to cultivate *imagination* as a feast for other living things, during life and after death.

Remember this from *The Basic Structure of Everything:*

Practices that successfully awaken us to undivided whole physimaginal YouWorldThingness experience... direct attention to the Manifest and Imaginal without reference to the attention-generated self. By fully experiencing our divided outer and inner worlds with indifference to how ego feels, what it likes or dislikes, or what it thinks it all means, we retrain our attention toward YouWorldThingness.

Treating both our body and our imagination as food for others, caring for them with the intention to provide a feast for others, is an effective spiritual practice for living with "*indifference to how ego feels, what it likes or dislikes, or what it thinks it all means."* It results in the dispelling of the *attention-generated-self*, and awakening to *YouWorldThingness*.

Living as a feast for others is the reverse of everything the world tells us to do and think and behave. But that's the whole point, right?

And again, consider *locality*.

No matter how we live, one little human physimaginal *YouWorldThingness* experience whirlpool won't have much impact on the whole great cosmic *Consciousness Currents of Imagination and Manifestation.* We're way too small.

But remember that *Recombination* has its greatest impact *locally.*

Forget the cosmos. Forget *Consciousness Currents* and the *Dark Sea of Awareness*.

Everything going on within the six mile thick (quite thin, actually) skin of Earth's living biosphere is a churning local stew of *Recombination*, both physically and imaginatively. One little human physimaginal *YouWorldThingness* experience whirlpool can have significant impact here as our bodies and imaginations rejoin the local pool from which new bodies and imaginations form.

Which brings me to Buddhism.

Theravada VS Mahayana

I am not a Buddhist, but I know enough armchair Buddhism to understand that there are two major diverging Buddhist positions concerning "enlightenment."

The Theravada tradition teaches that the goal of spiritual practice is to attain individual enlightenment and "escape the wheel of birth and death," which means to be permanently freed from the cycle of reincarnation.

The Mahayana tradition teaches that we should refuse to leave the wheel of birth and death until every other sentient being has attained enlightenment and escaped before us. In Mahayana Buddhism, a *Bodhisattva* (a person who is able to reach nirvana but delays doing so out of compassion in order to save suffering beings) works to achieve as much as possible in this lifetime, perhaps even enlightenment itself, but chooses to reincarnate after death into our suffering world to lead others to awakening. Only when every sentient being is liberated will Bodhisattvas escape and close the door behind the rest of.

The Basic Structure of Everything outlines four possible After Life (not afterlife) states:

- Death While Trapped in the Human Predicament (almost everyone)
- Death Having Reclaimed Attention, but Not Having Attained Transformative Stillness
- Death Having Attained Transformative Stillness, but Not Having Reclaimed Attention
- Death Having Reclaimed Attention and Attained Transformative Stillness

The first three states all have a Mahayana outcome. However much (or little) the individual attains in life, they donate it to the Biosphere upon death. The dispersal of their bodies and imaginations participate in new bodies and imaginations, new-formed imaginal beings, and increase by some real degree the awakening of everyone and everything. They make it easier for the next generation to do the same thing.

I recognize that the Bodhisattva ideal is individual, while I'm proposing something corporate, or *"we are all one-ish."* But the similarities are striking.

Of course, the vast majority of humans die in the physical suffering and imaginative fear and anxiety typified by Death While Trapped in the Human Predicament. All of that suffering, fear and anxiety are dumped wholesale at death into the local *Recombination* pool.

So it's definitely an uphill battle. We need more Bodhisattvas!

Like the Theravada practitioner who attains enlightenment and individually escapes the wheel of birth and death (sorry, Humanity, you're on your own!), when we Reclaim Attention and Attain Transformative Stillness in a single lifetime we attain immortality and are freed to set off alone across the *Dark Sea of Awareness.* You have to admit, it's a close parallel.

Speculation Four:

SUBJECTIFY "I"

In his 1979 book *The Dream and the Underworld*, psychologist James Hillman points out the inarguable, if counterintuitive, truth that when we appear in our own dreams, which is most of the time, the "I" in the dream is not us, the waking dreamer. "I" in the dream is a dream character like every other, like the landscape of the dream, like the actions of the dream, a phantasm spun to life by a "greater mind" dream-I has no clue exists.

When we recount dreams later, in therapy, say, we report, "I was…," "I met...," "I said…" We can fairly easily be convinced by a therapist that our sister in the dream isn't *really* our sister, our car our car, or our house our house. They're dream images, symbolic representations of some message our unconscious hopes to deliver to our "real" waking selves. But it's very hard to let go of "I" in dreams, to acknowledge dream-I as just another subjective symbolic representation.

Hillman writes:

To reach the fully subjective, a dream-worker must reach into the last pocket of objectivity, the dream-ego, its behavior and its feelings, keeping them within the image. The job becomes one of subjecting the ego to the dream, dissolving it into the dream by showing that everything done and felt and said by the ego reflects its situation in the image, i.e., that this ego is wholly imaginal.

... the "I" in the dream is no secret stage director (Schopenhauer) who wrote the play he acts in... The dream is not "mine," but the psyche's, and the dream-ego merely plays one of the roles in the theatre, subjected to what the "others" want, subject to the necessities staged by the dream.

Compare this from *The Basic Structure of Everything:*

Everything about a dream – the dream-world, the dream-you, dream characters, dream things, dream events – are born whole, a single inseparable doing. You may identify with the dream-you while the dream is unfolding, but once you're awake it's clear that all the apparently-separate characters, locations and events weren't really separate at all. There's only one thing here, the dream. Just because in a dream you identify your dream-body as a separate, tangible entity "in the world," and the dream-world of things as a self-existing reality outside of your dream-body, doesn't make it so.

Dream-you does not create the dream; dream-you *is a creation of the dream*. Hillman names the dream, and dream-I in it, as inseparable creations of *psyche.*

I take this argument a step further.

Again from *The Basic Structure of Everything:*

Just like waking life.

Just as a dream is a whole experience that blooms and fades as one – DreamWorldYouCharactersContentEvents —so your life, from beginning to end, cradle to grave, waking and sleeping, is a single experience, the seamless whole of YouWorldThingness.

We only experience ourselves to be physical daytime bodies in a physical daytime world VS dreamers inhabiting a nightworld/ otherworld/dreamworld because of The Human Predicament. Physis and Psyche are unnatural partitions within physimaginal YouWorld-Thingness, equal consequences of the coming into being of the attention-generated self.

What James Hillman says of dreams in *The Dream and the Underworld* is also true of waking life.

A paraphrase:

...the "I" in waking experience is no secret stage director (Schopenhauer) who wrote the play he acts in... Waking experience is not "mine," but essence's, and the waking-ego merely plays one of the

roles in the theatre, subjected to what the "others" want, subject to the necessities staged by waking experience.

What Hillman labels *psyche*, the author of our dreams, is what, in waking life, I have labeled *essence*. Every detail of life, waking and dreaming, *is essence* (physimaginal *YouWorld-Thingness)*, which does not "belong" to the *attention-generated self*. The "secret stage director" exists but it is not us, not the "I" with which we identify by day or by night. *Essence* must be discovered, and as Gurdjieff would have it, *awakened*.

So, how do we awaken *essence* and release *YouWorldThingness* from its identification with ego/I/*the attention-generated self?*

Regarding dreams, Hillman recommends:

An imaginal ego is further built by voiding its old ground... – moralism, personalism, naturalism, literalism – deriving from the corporal perspective. The old heroic ego loses its stuffing and returns to a two-dimensional shade. Then it is able to reflect its deeds metaphorically. Then it may realize that the ego in the dream is also a wholly subjective figure, who is now void of the I...

Yes, we must subjectify our dream-ego, void its old ground of moralism, personalism, naturalism, literalism, until it is at home in the dark, moving among images as one of them. This is the spiritual practice of dreamwork.

But we must equally subjectify our waking-ego, our *attention-generated self*, void its old ground of moralism, personalism, naturalism, literalism, until it is at home amidst the appearances of the daylight world, moving among manifestations as one of them. This is the spiritual practice of wakingwork.

For Castaneda aficionados, these strongly suggest *dreaming* and *stalking*, respectively.

By day, I recommend this loose paraphrase of Hillman:

... to reach the fully subjective, a waking-worker must reach into the last pocket of objectivity, the waking-ego, its behavior and its feelings, refusing to mistake it for "the secret stage director." Waking life is not

"mine." The job becomes one of subjecting the waking-ego to experience, dissolving it into the dream or the world by showing that everything done and felt and said by the ego reflects its situation in the physimaginal YouWorldThingness of essence.

Speculation Five:

DO NOT PROTECT YOURSELF

I have long attributed the following quote to 1960's YIPPIE! and cultural revolutionary Abbie Hoffman, who was the first great hero of my youth. I read all his books in my teens, and was powerfully influenced and inspired by his thinking. I've held this quote as a core value for forty years. But, oddly, I have never as an adult been able to locate it in any book, or even on the internet, to verify the wording or the attribution...

I'm pretty sure it was Abbie, though. Here's how I remember it:

"Live like a screen door in a hurricane. Let everything blast through. The important stuff will be what sticks."

Such a great metaphor for radical openness.

Experience everything. Don't pick and choose.

The closed door that resists the hurricane of *experience* gets blown to smithereens.

The open screen door resists nothing. Everything passes through. *Experience* itself decides what sticks.

In *Views from the Real World: Early Talks of Gurdjieff*, G.I. Gurdjieff put the same advice this way:

Do not forget to concentrate all your attention. . . Do not be overcurious nor waste time on things that attract your attention but are not worth it. Time is precious and should not be wasted on things which have no direct relation to your aim. Remember where you are and why you are here. Do not protect yourself and remember that no effort is made in vain. And now you can set out on the way.

Similarly, *The Basic Structure of Everything* states:

Practices that successfully awaken us to undivided whole physimaginal YouWorldThingness experience... direct attention to the

Manifest and Imaginal without reference to the attention-generated self. By fully experiencing our divided outer and inner worlds with indifference to how ego feels, what it likes or dislikes, what it thinks it all means, we retrain our attention toward YouWorldThingness.

When we chase happiness and run from sorrow, embrace what attracts us and spurn what repels us, and insist things can mean only what we want them to mean, we close the door. We risk being blown to smithereens.

By entertaining likes and dislikes, by demanding the right to pick and choose, by pretending we can (or must) embrace some parts of *experience* while protecting ourselves from others we conspire to remain divided against ourselves.

Preferring or rejecting aspects of *experience* keeps us trapped in *The Human Predicament*.

Protecting ourselves from *experience* keeps us trapped in *The Human Predicament*.

We cannot simultaneously pursue pleasure/avoid pain and wake up to *YouWorldThingness*.

Do not protect yourself.

Live like a screen door in a hurricane.

The important stuff will be what sticks.

Speculation Six:

A PREMISE AND A PROMISE

Since I first sat down to write *The Simplest Path to Personal and Planetary Awakening: FREE YOUR MIND* back in 2005, my goal has always been to *keep it simple, sister!* (KISS).

Spiritual awakening, stripped of its memetic trappings, is *simple*, as in *it is not complicated*.

It took me a whole book to break down the process by which we are transformed in childhood from untamed balls of awareness into hypnotized adults possessing and enslaved by an *attention-generated self*.

In just a few essays in this appendix, I've managed to lay out a working schema of how reality really works, and what that makes possible for human beings.

In this speculation I'm going to make it even simpler.

For all the pomp and circumstance built up around religion and spirituality, true human spiritual awakening comes down to just two things – a *premise* and a *promise*.

The Premise:

What we mistake for a real and external physical world, which includes our own physical bodies with their sense of selfhood with an inner world of mind, *is a dream*. Not "like a dream." We and the world actually *are a dream*. The world and each of us living in it are dreamstuff in exactly the sense that our nighttime dreams create worlds entire, filled with startlingly "life-like" dream characters. It's all just *awareness* in motion, currents of *consciousness* spinning up temporary whirlpools of *experience*.

You and I and everyone else are dream characters with as much substantiality as the characters we dream at night, which is none.

To awaken spiritually means to experience for ourselves that we are characters in a dream, and that – this part is critical – IT'S NOT OUR DREAM.

Just as the "you" in your nighttime dreams isn't actually you, the dreamer, but is rather a dream character representation of you, waking you is not the dreamer, either. Waking you is also a dream character representation of the real dreamer.

And so am I. And so is everyone else. So are animals, insects, plants, dirt, mountains, cities, oceans, planets, stars… everyone and everything you can think of.

Once you experience the dream *as dream*, it will feel subjectively like you are a lucid dreamer, awake within the dream, with new powers to control the setting, narrative, and other dream elements. That's how humans *experience* awakening.

But even that is not quite true. The truth is that once you awaken to the reality of the dream, *you become a point of lucidity within it*. It is the dreamer who is awake within the dream, made lucid by your lucidity. You are not *you being lucid*. You are the dreamer experiencing lucidity through a representative dream character – YOU.

There's nothing more to say about this. Beyond this point there is only *experience*. It's time to stop thinking about awakening and just do it.

The Promise:

The promise is that you can experience the premise for yourself. You do not have to take the premise *as true* on faith. You only have to accept the premise *as possible* on faith – and even there, only with sufficient faith to speculatively invest effort into redirecting your attention away from your *attention-generated self*, and into practicing transformative stillness.

The promise is that there is nothing you must DO to experience the premise and awaken spiritually.

If reality really is a dream as the premise suggests, then the reason you experience the world as physical and external, and yourself as both physical and mental, outer body and inner mind, is because *you are continually working hard to maintain that illusion*.

You are working hard by focusing all of your attention on your *attention-generated self*, for example.

You are working hard by keeping yourself relentlessly busy, always in motion.

The promise is that if you will *stop doing those things* your self-generated illusions will eventually fall away and reality as-it-is will be revealed.

Redirect your attention. Practice stillness.

When you and the world resolve into dream, *be lucidity*.

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